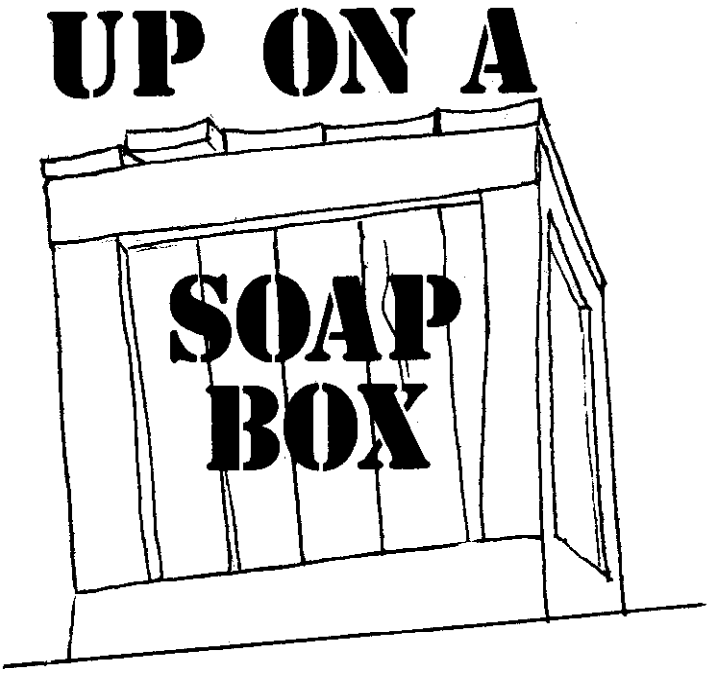
UP ON A



CONVENTIONS: THE MANUFACTURER'S VIEW

Gary Gygax - TSR Hobbies, Inc. President

Lately there have been some unfavorable comments from dealers and hobbyists regarding manufacturer convention attendance. Both sources seem to view the manufacturer/publisher as a fat-cat or profit-taker. While I cannot speak for the industry, I can say a few words in behalf of TSR Hobbies, Inc.

One of the principal attractions at a convention are the exhibitors. This is especially true when the convention attracts many publishers and manufacturers who are showing new items at the convention. In effect, it requires quite a number of manufacturers and publishers, and their "name" personnel, to assure that any big convention is a success. Attendees are disappointed, to say the least, if their favorite company fails to show. Thus, convention sponsors and the conventioneers put considerable pressure upon the publishers and manufacturers to attend. The goodwill generated from "showing the flag" is considerable. Still, considering that there are probably half a million game hobbyists, and perhaps no more than about 10,000 different gamers attending the major conventions, half of whom will be the biggest show, the overall portion of the market reached by exhibiting is 1% to 2% or so. Even if this "hard core" represents a disproportionate share of the market in dollar volume of their purchases, 2½% to 5% is not earthshaking. Yet, whenever TSR attends a convention, we must assume that the advertising and goodwill generated there will be considerable, and be prepared to write off a considerable sum as expense incurred advertising.

It costs much more in time and money than most people realize to attend a convention. Assume that the decision is made to attend a convention in 1980. One or more persons must then begin spending small amounts of time to determine what new release will be shown there, who will represent the firm, what merchandise will be taken, where these people will stay, and so forth. As the convention date draws near, an inventory must be made of merchandise taken, the products shipped or packed, and displays readied. Arrangements to run tournaments must be made, and in our case, special games need often be prepared. The personnel attending the convention are unable to do their routine work, and this means from one to three days time is lost in normal production—that figure is per person attending, of course. Here is an estimate of what it costs to send four employees to a convention 800 miles distant from TSR's headquarters:

Pre-convention work: 5 days @ $40/day	$200
Miscellaneous expenses (ads, postage, etc.)	100
Round trip mileage in van: 1,600 miles @25c/mile	400
Salary for employees: 4 days travel time # convention days @ $40/employee/day	1,120
Motel room costs: 2 rooms @ $50/night each x5 nights	250
Meals: @ $15/person/day x7 days	420
Post-convention unloading, inventory, and accounting: 1 day @ $40/day	40
TOTAL EST. AVERAGE COSTS	$2,530

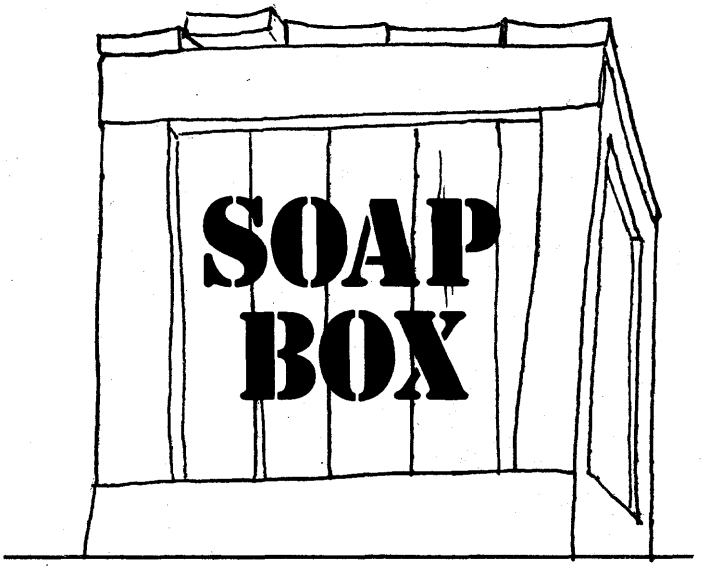
Let us say that with care that that can be trimmed to a modest $2,000. That sum does not consider booth costs or lost production time, but let's also assume that the personnel who are being sent are not presently engaged in hot projects, and that they are efficient and conscientious, so that only *four man-weeks* are actually lost. When the exhibitor sets up the booth, they know that they will have to sell far many more thousands of dollars worth of products than a mere two *just to break even!* The actual cost of the items sold, taxes, royalties, and other costs eat up a fair portion of each and every dollar. In addition, the true fact is that *most of the sales made at the convention by the exhibitor would be made anyway!* If the conventioneers don't buy from the publisher at the convention, they will buy from their local dealer instead. While such sales represent a lower margin for the manufacturer, there are no high expenses up front to be concerned about. Allow a generous 10% in additional new and impulse sales, and the dollar volume necessay to justify attending the convention is still very great indeed.

So why, you may well ask, considering the disruption, the loss of production time, the expense, and the sheer wear-and-tear on personnel attending, do publishers and manufacturers attend? Well, as already stated, there is the promotion and goodwill to consider. There is also the possibility of making new dealer contacts. Regular dealers also tend to come to the major conventions in order to pick up goods at the close of the show, so this helps even out the chancy nature of regular retail sales during the event. Finally, the last resort is write-off of expenses not covered by convention sales as advertising and promotion expense. Non-business considerations also apply. After all, most of us at TSR are hobbyists too, and we certainly wish to do all we can for the gamers and to promote the hobby.

The bigger the company, the more difficult it becomes to attend a convention due to the dislocation the whole thing causes. (This doesn't apply to the really *big* companies, of course, for they have full-time personnel just to handle this sort of thing, or huge ad budgets which allow the use of advertising firms to handle convention promotions.) In addition, the first line of convention attendance for such game hobby publishers or manufacturers must be the trade show—the HIA annual event in the winter, and possibly various other annual and regional toy and hobby shows. These are considerably *more* expensive than a gaming convention and require at least as much preparation and dislocation The top personnel in the organization must be there, so it represents more salary cost and production time loss, too. These events certainly devour most of the money budgeted for conventions, because they represent the opportunity to make great gains in new market areas and write large wholesale orders. Even when the firm becomes much larger, the proportionate expense doesn't drop much, as space and exhibit costs are increased to meet the needs and status of the company.

In short, most exhibitors are at conventions because they love the hobby, in my opinion. The small companies do need the volume and exposure, but today there are a dozen or more companies that I feel certain only break even at best at the biggest gaming conventions. They come, not to steal dollars from their dealers, but to serve the hobby. The sales are not a greedy grasping of the hobbyists hard-earned dollars, but simply an attempt to offset the considerable expenses incurred of coming to the event, showing their wares, and putting on tournaments for the attendees. Game hobby publishers and military miniatures manufacturers are not altruistic, at least first and foremost, or else they wouldn't be able to remain in business for long. They are serving the hobby at least as much as they are serving their own ends, however, when they travel long distances (or even short ones) to exhibit at a gaming convention. For that, you can take my word!

UP ON A SOAP BOX



Standardization vs. Playability

by Bob Bledsaw

My background in industrial design has made me well aware of the relative merits of standardization. My background in gaming has made me more respectful yet of the overworked word "playability" . . . usually found next to the copy on boxes stating "For 8 years and Up."

Standardization makes for ease of play . . . generally. However, there are many areas in fantasy campaign designing where standardization makes little or no contribution to playability. When a judge begins the designing of social structures for an active campaign, he is immediately faced with several problems resulting from rule systems which introduce standardization of fighting ability, intelligence, alignment, size, dexterity, and other concepts among the races of fantastic creatures with which he is attempting to populate his "fantasy" universe.

I have found it very expeditious (and more fun) to consider these limitations as representative of the particular creature type or race . . . in other words, the prevalent mode. This allows the judge to have unusually intelligent members of an otherwise low-intelligence type of fantastic creature to interact with player characters, lead organized lives of benefit to themselves, create organizations, formulate diabolically clever plans, and give a more realistic feel to negotiations and other actions so common in an active campaign.

I'm not suggesting that the judge should fit a normal curve to all characteristics ascribed to these creature types. Something far simpler suffices quite well . . . like permitting plus or minus one for forty percent, plus or minus two for twenty percent, and plus or minus three for five percent to the average characteristics for that type. A further refinement would be to create multi-modal adders to allow some simulation of racial characteristics, tribal influences, or environmental skewing of certain characteristics such as a history of contact with creatures of higher intelligence might introduce. Thus the players can be fairly certain that the "wandering monster" is the standard type to be expected and yet the system allows some interesting and unique encounters for those adventures structured in more depth by the judge.

Further applications of this approach would easily apply to technology, religion (mythos), and languages. Let's tackle the toughest one first, technology. My explanation for the difference in technology from one area in a fantastic campaign to another would run something like this: The rapid spread of technology throughout mankind's history is peculiar to man himself and much abetted by the inherent ability of mankind to adjust to new situations or adapt to new environments.

In a world replete with more competitors for the highest rung on the predatory ladder, this ability is hampered by warfare (one of the best, if not the best, catalyst for technological advancement) with these other creatures instead of other men. Warfare with creatures of higher intelligence will cause more technological advancement, warfare with other men will create normal technological advancement, and warfare with creatures of lower intelligence will introduce stagnation and complacency.

Many of the creatures themselves (while a viable political force at this stage of mankind's technological development) may not possess the same environmental adaptability as mankind . . . i.e., a Stone Age technology might well be the prevalent technological level of most goblin tribes. Of course, this logic is predicated on the basis that there exist creatures almost as populous or more populous than mankind of high enough intelligence to represent a real political threat, while low enough in intelligence to inspire complacency . . . mankind is gradually winning the climb up the ladder.

The use of a working everyday magic system also retards "real" research to increase technology . . . although I would consider high technology items to be magical devices for all practical purposes in any fantasy campaign where knowledge of these devices is not commonplace.

The spread of technology through trade is also severely restricted, because trade itself is severely restricted to items of very high value and a highly portable nature. Anarchy prevails beyond the gates, and only the most stalwart of merchants will venture forth in the best of times. Warfare may bring out the animal cunning, but it wrecks the prospect of an adequate return on investment.

The limits of technological level attainable by any civilization, creature type, or sage individuals should be determined by the judge when he develops his campaign. Most opt to exclude the prospect of explosives, and I heartily concur that this seriously affects the "swords and sorcery" flavor preferred by most fantasy role-playing enthusiasts. The unique prospect of obtaining a phaser with its power supply very low or a .38 revolver with four shots left is almost too much temptation for many campaign players and should not affect the campaign overmuch, unless such an item falls into the hands of a super-genius with the motivation and resources necessary to exploit the happenstance without personal hazard.

I like the most advanced areas in my campaign to possess inventions such as telescopes (simple spyglasses), sextants, rudimentary alchemy, and higher mathematics (inspired, no doubt, by the esoteric pursuit of high magic and the symmetrical balance necessary to achieve "safe" magical results).

I tend to prescribe a technological level attainable in any certain area by villages and city states. The general population is assumed to be completely self-sufficient at lower technological levels, with "specialization" becoming prominent as technology rises to the "medieval" level. Thus, the populus has small inducement to risk the hazards of travel and usually live out their lives within short distance of their birthplace, excepting nomads and hunting parties. This further restricts the propagation of technology.

Technological breakthroughs are generally regarded as the closely guarded secrets of priests, guildmasters, and rulers . . . and are disseminated to the average citizen or tribesman only when it serves the purpose of the possessor of same. One can easily imagine that "magic swords" were indeed wielded in days of yore . . . being more flexible, staying sharp longer, of lighter weight and therefore faster, and constructed with hand guards able to withstand stout direct blows. Ask any metallurgist about the ritual tempering of steel in living blood to produce the fabled blades of the Middle East. The raw materials were available. elsewhere, but no ruler could glean the secret of Damascus steel from the privileged few.

The areas where technology has developed beyond the normal weal should be located at some point conducive to the dissemination of knowledge. Rivers are the superhighways of the ancient and medieval civilizations, and real advantage accrues to trade centers located thereon. This should not exclude the possibility of a "lost" civilization of advanced technology, cut off by some catastrophe of major dimension or pur-

posely kept secret by powerful magics or technology in some fantasy campaigns. But they are the exception, not the general case. Nor are established trade routes to be excluded from a non-standard technology campaign; they must involve much peril, however.

Areas with higher technology must be located near areas with agrarian capacity to support the increased specialization mentioned earlier. A favorable climate is also desirable for favored technological areas. Creature comforts must be obtained with reasonable ease to permit the more energetic to achieve higher goals. Periods of peace enforced by a strong military presence would permit a relaxing of some of the barriers of trade, thereby increasing the stimuli of foreign ideas. A resource to attract these traders and increase specialization would also encourage technology.

Some interesting benefits accrue in a non-standard technology campaign, although it must be considered early in the design stage or the range of technology might not fit the mythos desired. It is quite rewarding to observe the distraction of a player-character far from home attempting to purchase a light horse with worthless soft metal discs in an area where barter is the only trade medium technologically available. As with characteristics for types of creatures, I would recommend a mode of something akin to medieval technology with a spread on the lower end back to the Bronze or Stone age and at the upper end up to early Renaissance or Late Medieval technology. One last caution: The highest technology extant in an area well may be common knowledge but will also command the highest prices and may be rare or uniquely controlled to retain its use in that area for obvious advantage of the controller.

Religion is a fertile source of cults, political factions, subcultures, mores, and social structure. It is the wellspring of a whole character class. It has inspired warfare from the beginning of mankind's history. For those judges who prefer a one-mythos campaign, I recommend that you skip this section; it has little to offer you.

Most fantasy literature presupposes a multitudinous approach to religion. The introduction of many pantheons in a campaign will generally enrich it. While some societies may be based solely on a "state" religion, the interesting variety of religions in densely populated areas is obvious.

In fantasy role-playing, it makes the non-player characters more believable, inasmuch as they are split into factions and yet practice some tolerance to live together. I dislike sending the player-character to any or every village populated by humans to visit the temple of his choice as much as I dislike sending them to Elfland to hire Elves. Any civilized or barbaric group will have more than one religion, although the one that isn't predominant may be a branch of the main one (mode). I like to have no fixed method of determining how many religions will be practiced in an area, but recommend that the number rise geometrically with the population . . . resplendent with false gods, minor gods, household gods, and class gods.

The judge need not enumerate or "flesh out" any more than necessary at any point in his campaign. Leave it up to the player-character clerics to determine rituals, hierarchy titles, and the less important details of the minor religions unless it is important to the action in your campaign. While it leaves few decisions for your clerics to make if you have few religions, the introduction of many religions will put political and social limits on the sway of the religions in your campaign, making it more competitive for the clerics and a ready source of quests, conflicts, and conversions. Not every religion needs a temple, but every judge needs controls and motivators in a large campaign.

Languages have been frequently glossed over in many campaigns because of the need to encourage, not discourage, interaction between the players and the non-player characters which add spice to play. All intelligent creature types will develop unique dialects if separated by any real distance from their fellow creatures.

The common tongue should pose a real danger of misinterpretation every time it is used to communicate with creatures of less than average intelligence, and even highly intelligent creatures if the player-characters have traveled far from their original stamping grounds. In other words, the common tongue should develop dialects as the player-characters move further away from the place where they learned it. The introduction of some dialectic differences and different languages for the same type of creatures will not increase playability for action at the inception

(cont. on page 25)

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were also augmented by hiring large numbers of Cossacks from the steppes.

Russian infantry varied greatly in type and quality, and was often supported by units of German mercenaries with pike and musket. The best Russian infantry were the Streltsi of the Imperial Guard. They were all armed with musket, saber and axe, and wore a long, orange or yellowish-brown coat. The elite Streltsi of the Czar's bodyguard, wore a very unusual uniform, consisting of tight chain mail trousers tucked into boots, a mail shirt with brass strips for added strength, and a mail hauberk with a face screen similar to that of the noble cavalry. These bodyguards were generally armed with a bardische (a long, Russian battle-axe), and a saber.

Other Russian infantry included Zaporozian peasants who fought with battle-axe and saber, and foot Cossacks, generally armed with musket, arquebus or crossbow, who acted as skirmishers and scouts.

With the exception of the Turks, none of these countries had any real appreciation of the power and importance of artillery, and were very slow to adopt to Western methods. In fact, ambassadors sent to Russia by Elizabeth I of England, commented on the military maneuvers of large numbers of horse archers.

It was not until the reign of Peter the Great, that the Russians saw the need to adopt Western methods. He took the polyglot, antiquated army and turned it into a first class fighting machine. He introduced artillery, and made sure that his gunners were well trained. By the time of the Great Northern War in 1700, the Russian army could hold its own against the best. Peter's crushing defeat of Charles XII's Swedish army was firm proof of the fact.

Overall, the inclusion of a few Eastern units, or entire Eastern European campaigns, would make a colorful and interesting sidelight to your normal Renaissance wargames.

Next Time: Landsknechnts and Reiters

Address All Questions and Comments To:

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Phila., Pa. 19145

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SOAP BOX

(con't from page 21)

of a campaign, but will tend to restrict the movement of player-characters to fairly familiar territory (unless at the head of any army or the shoulder of an interpreter), until later in the campaign when the judge will be better prepared for such expeditions (or invasions). This may at first seem like a less important control for a large campaign, but it does have impact and will limit the wanderlust until you are able to cope.

Thus ends my diatribe against mothers, apple pie, and standardization. Although I abhor complication for the sake of miniscule tweaks which have little impact or importance on outcome in a game because it sacrifices playability, the net effect of a few design considerations when setting up a campaign will do nothing to harm play, spark the imagination, aid in the controlled growth of player-characters, and add much to the pleasure to be had by all.

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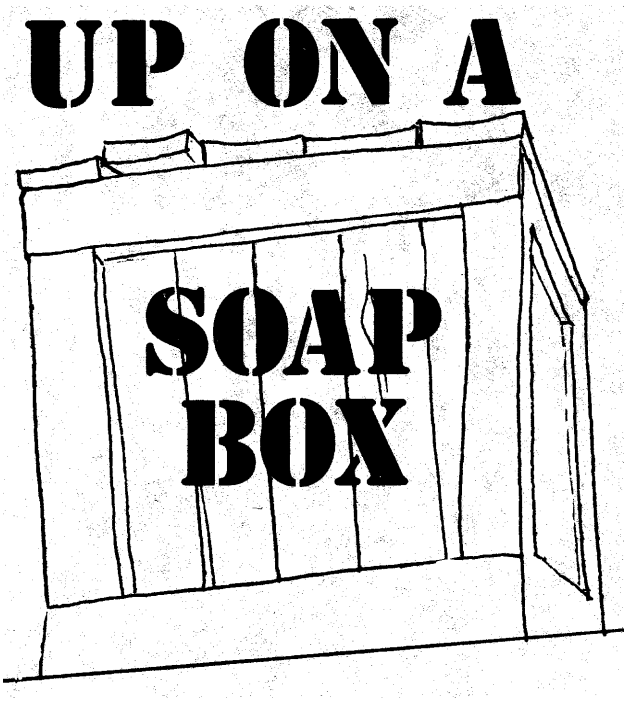

Samuel Gill

The most fascinating statements in wargaming often begin with "Suppose . . ." and "What if . . . ?". Many wargamers are content to play without taxing their creative faculties very heavily, perfectly happy to re-fight Waterloo or Gettysburg over again and add nothing new. But for some players the judicious use of imagination adds a new dimension to the hobby.

By "imagination" I do not mean simply the derivative and pedestrian fantasizing so routinely intended to spice up comic-book heroics, but real, solidly-grounded historical speculation. Speculation of this sort used to be a staple of scholarly research. English historians, for example, often used to wonder what would have been the effect of a Saxon victory at Hastings, and German scholars would debate on how much sooner their nation might have been united had not the Hohenstauffens died out in 1268. In our own country, surely every schoolboy is familiar with the question "What if the South had won the Civil War?".

This sort of speculation is no longer considered good form in professional historiography, but it still holds great appeal for the amateur researcher and the perceptive wargamer. War and rumors of war continue to fascinate in literature. as well as on the game table. Nineteenth-century Britons were dismayed by their fictional defeat at the hands of the Prussians in the Victorian horror story *The Battle of Dorking*, and those who game in that period today would do well to ponder the lessons of that tale. Similarly, no naval gamer worth his tot of rum can consider himself a real blue-water admiral until he has digested Bywater's classic 1925 prophecy of *The Great Pacific War*. To mention one last example in this vein, what World War II buff would not thrill to C.S. Forester's matchless tale of Operation Sea Lion in *If Hitler Had Invaded England?*

It should be apparent from the above that imagination in military speculation is nothing new, and that fighting the wars that reasonably might have been is as high a calling for the wargamer as serving in those that actually were. There are, of course, limits. A wargame at the set-piece battle or campaign level should first be fun, but one in which, say, Robert E. Lee faced Napoleon I would probably strain the credulity of mature wargamers past the breaking point. Similarly, a clash between Bolivia and Bulgaria might be fun—but then again, it might not, and there is no historical basis for even daydreaming of such a contest. No, the best way to exercise imagination in a fictitious wargame is to explore some unresolved tactical principle or strategic match-up in the setting of a mythical conflict which might very conceivably have happened. You may have to strain logistics and turn a Nelsonian blind eye to diplomacy, but the games are worth it. Here are scenarios for some of my favorites:

This game rests on two historical postulates, both entirely plausible: 1) that the Imperial Russians refused to sell Alaska to the United States in 1867 and developed it themselves, and 2) that the discovery of gold in the Klondike precipitated a war over the long-standing territorial squabble between the two powers. Because of the layout of the theater of war, there will be little direct confrontation between ground forces (which is just as well for the U.S.!), but the intricate naval possibilities should whet the appetite of every would-be Mahan in wargaming.

With a Russian North Pacific Squadron based on Dutch Harbor and the U.S. Navy operating out of Puget Sound, the wargamer is free to fight out a full-scale, pre-Dreadnought naval war, using ships that actually existed in a seldom-trodden area of the globe. Who would have won had Dewey and Makaroff matched wits in the Gulf of Alaska? How would "McKinley's Bulldog," USS Oregon, have fared, broadside to broadside off Kodiak Island with one of the Czar's battlewagons flying the Cross of St. Andrew? There's one way to find out—and this is it.

The Mexican-Texican War—1842

This one requires very little imagining, since independent Texas really was at war with Mexico during much of the brief history of the Lone Star Republic. Actual hostilities were on a small scale because of the unsettled state of Texas and the internal squabbles of Mexico, but that needn't bother the wargamer with a little verve and a flexible sense of the past.

Your fictitious campaign has plenty of action, ashore and afloat. (There actually were clashes between the Texican Navy and Mexico's surprisingly modem fleet.) For uniform freaks, the Mexican army of this period is undoubtedly the most gaudy and gorgeous of any era in wargaming. Every private soldier dressed like a Turkish generalissimo at least, and the Texicans, in drabber dark gray fatigues, make a pleasing contrast on the battlefield. Could Santa Ana have recovered Mexico's lost provinces and avenged San Jacinto? Let him have a try!

The Great War at Sea-The Mediterranean, 1914

For armchair strategists and wargamers, one of the great annoyances of history is that Italy defaulted on her commitments to the Triple Alliance when World War I broke out. Had the Italians joined Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Med might have echoed to the thunder of fleet actions. nearly as large and fully as important as those that were actually fought in the North Sea. Isn't it a shame that they never used all those big dreadnoughts!

Mere facts need not deter the imaginative wargamer, however, from conducting a fictitious campaign of great drama. Tunisia is French; Libya, Italian. The British hold Egypt, and their Mediterranean Fleet operates out of Gibraltar, Malta, or Alexandria. Their French allies are based on Toulon. Opposed to the Anglo-French forces we have the large Italian Navy, stiffened by Austria-Hungary's four ultra-modem battleships and SMS *Goeben*. The Triple Alliance warships operate from Pola, Taranto, and La Spezia or Palermo. It is possible to imagine further that von Spee's squadron, escaping destruction at the Falklands, might enter the Mediterranean to reinforce the Austro-Italians. There might even be a mighty clash of dreadnoughts in the shadow of Gibraltar! Power and glory to the victors-and the deep six for the lost. Can any wargamer ask for a better chance?

The Anglo-France-German War—1886

"La Revanche" was a fiery issue for all patriotic Frenchmen for 40 years after France's humiliating defeat in the France-Prussian War of 1870-71. Hostilities might have been renewed at any time, and at no time was war closer than during the Bastille Day hysteria of 1886 when that be-medalled effigy General Georges Boulanger—the original "man on horseback"—flared briefly across the French political scene. In actual fact, Boulanger tiresomely committed suicide on the grave of his mistress and the war fever passed. But suppose history had taken a different turn . . . .

The excitable Gauls rally behind their idol of the moment. The Third Republic falls to a Boulangist coup. War is declared! La Patrie en Danger! Aux Armes, Citoyens! Imagine Bismarck mobilizing his war machine and Queen Victoria's government viewing the situation with alarm. Sir Gamet Wolseley lands at Boulogne with Her Majesty's Expeditionary Force in support of the French. The Germans march, this time not under the supremely competent elder Moltke but under his erratic successor Count von Waldersee.

What will be the results? Will we need maps of Alsace or of the Rhineland? Will the conflict echo to triumphant shouts of "A Berlin!" or "Nach Paris!"? The astute wargamer may be the only one in a position to know.

The Great Caribbean War—1902

The Caribbean area is one of the most interesting strategic theaters in the world. But—alas for the wargamer!—there has been little large-scale sustained combat activity there since the days of Drake and Morgan. However, a little imagination can quickly rectify this unpromising state of affairs.

Let's start by supposing that the Confederacy wins the American Civil War. Given that first assumption, it is then fairly logical to further suppose that, in the absence of threatened U.S. intervention, Maximilian would have succeeded in sustaining himself as Emperor of Mexico. Now, given these two historical might-have-beens, it is then inevitable that war would break out between the Confederacy and the Mexican Empire for mastery of the Caribbean.

Our club picked 1902 as the date for opening this particular war since we wished to fight a naval campaign using pre-dreadnought ships and hail-of-shot tactics. However, 1921 or 1943 would do just as well as the turn of the century if you wished to sample the all-big-gun and aircraft carrier tactics of those periods.

In the 1902 scenario we interposed an independent and neutral Republic of Texas between Mexico and the CSA in order to be able to concentrate solely on the naval aspect of the conflict However, if you enjoy land warfare on a huge scale there is room for over one hundred divisions to deploy on either side of the explosive Rio Grande frontier. Here is one more chance for Mexico to redeem her former glory. Viva el Imperio!

Bleeding Kansas—1940

Assuming that the South wins the Civil War, it is surely permissible to postulate the further fragmentation of the Union. According to this speculation, by 1940 the disputed area of the present state of Kansas is bounded on the north by, say, the neutral Great Lakes Republic, and on the south by a non-belligerent Confederacy, Republic of Texas, or even (see previous scenario!) Mexican Empire.

With the neutrals disposed of we are free to consider our opponents in this mythical Kansas theater of war: On the east we have the rump of the United States of America, with its war machine operating from Kansas City; and on the west, the powerful militarism of the Commonwealth of the Pacific, whose forces are based on Denver. The flat plains of Kansas, a 600-mile stretch of level battleground, are thus, for wargaming purposes, converted into a veritable North African Desert where the exploits of Rommel and his 88's, the Desert Rats and the Long Range Desert Group can be satisfyingly recreated in a totally different setting by the tough tankers of the Pacific Commonwealth and the armored cavalry of the US.

The Anglo-Italian War—1935

One of the greatest pleasures for the mature wargamer should be in commanding the underdog and still giving a good account. Good wargamers, therefore, should welcome the challenge offered by commanding Italian armed forces, especially the flashy Italian Navy. The historical pretext for their mythical war with Great Britain is ready to hand. England was opposed to Italy's farcical Abyssinian adventure of the mid-30s and was a leader in trying to halt what then seemed to be the Italian juggernaut in its round of conquest. In fact, England's opposition never went beyond endorsing a few feeble sanctions by the

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League of Nations, but there is no reason to suppose that a more resolute British government might not have gone much further.

I have always felt that, given the staunch leadership of any wargaming admiral, the Italian Navy in the Mediterranean could have done much better in an imaginary conflict than it did in real life. To even the odds a bit you might even allow the Italians of our fictitious 1935 war the use of their stillborn aircraft carrier Aquila a decade before her actual scheduled operational readiness. Italy had more submarines than any other power of that era too, and her air force, the famous Regia Aeronautica, was considered a world leader. . . . Hmmm, maybe the underdog isn't Italy after all, but the shoestring Royal Navy. Will history repeat itself? Or, this time, will Malta and even Gibraltar fall to the Fascisti?

The Irish Rebellion—1810

Ireland has been in rebellion against somebody since the Ninth Century, so it puts a minimum strain on historical credulity to imagine just one more bloody revolt. Now, during the Napoleonic Wars, it was the recurring dream of successive French governments to land an expeditionary force in Ireland in order to keep England occupied away from the Continent. Bantry Bay seems to have been a favorite landing point for land-bound French strategists.

Let's say, then, that in 1810 Marshal Davout succeeds in getting ashore with a corps of 25,000 men or so. The bog-trotters welcome the Frogs with open arms and soon raise a green-jacketed Irish Legion, 10,000 strong, to help oppose the British redcoats under, say, the brave old Duke of York. What possibilities are thereby opened up for a fresh Napoleonic campaign on the untrodden turf of the Emerald Isle!

The Franco-Japanese War—1906

Suppose that in 1906 the Emperor of Japan, having settled his quarrel with the Russians over Korea, sends his myopic little Sons of Heaven southward to win more Oriental lebensraum in what was, in those simpler days, French Indo-China. Admiral Togo, therefore, after attacking Port Arthur from Sasebo, descends with his torpedo boats on Saigon from Formosa. The French Navy of this period was composed of strangely designed but serviceable warships and might be assumed to include a powerful Far Eastern squadron. The French have a choice of several excellent harbors—Haiphong, Saigon, or even the commodious deep-water anchorage at Cam Ranh Bay. The waters of the South China Sea are wide and so bounded by the Philippines, the Netherlands East Indies, and the mainland of Asia as to make a fine, enclosed campaigning theater.

And what, in such a conflict of East and West, would have been the role of an American squadron based on Cavite, a Dutch flotilla operating from Batavia, or those then Japanese allies, the British, with a strong force at Singapore? How would tactics have changed during the war had even one newly built dreadnought suddenly been committed to an action between older styles of warships? Would the Tricolor triumph? Or does the Far East belong to the Rising Sun?

The Conquest of the North—1003

For centuries European geographers depicted on their dragon-decorated and mist-shrouded maps the elusive New World Indian kingdom of Norumbega, ever fading westward as exploration advanced.

Now suppose Norumbega actually existed. We find it located astride the mouth of the St. Lawrence River and farther north in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a savage tribal feudality a land where the ferocious natives file their feet to points and, with unspeakable barbarity on nights of full moon, make human sacrifice to their hideous idols.

Got the picture of Norumbega? Now imagine the sensation in the viks of Norway and Sweden if Leif the Lucky had returned from this Vinland with tales of gold instead of wild grapes! Hordes of piratical Vikings take ship for the west. Operating in their dragonships out of Eric the Red's Greenland stronghold, they descend with fire and sword on the primitive coasts of North America. . . .

Here is an engrossing opportunity for the wargamer to allow his imagination free rein, to people unknown coasts with man-eating hostiles, to raise cities in barbaric splendor, and still to remain within the bounds of known tactics and possibilities in the age of edged-weapon warfare. Will Leif conquer Canada? Will the Vikings establish a northem kingdom girdling the Pole? If so, what would be the effect on the American Indian if the Norsemen conquer?

Looking ahead five centuries, what if Cortez had lost?

I'm sure that the above examples give the reader some idea of how creative imagination can enhance wargaming. But how do you start? Let me give one final instance of a scenario on which I've been doing some research. It starts with an interview between Shaka, the founder of the Zulu empire, and a white settler in South Africa in 1826. The white man was describing European musketry tactics of the day and Shaka put his finger on the weakness of such tactics when at grips with his Zulu warriors, viz., in the length of time it took the European to reload his clumsy, smoothbore musket, a resolute Zulu might close with his assegai. The tactical problem could have been a thorny one, but it was never really resolved in large scale combat. In the conquest of the New World the musket-armed Europeans never had to face a native army as numerous or highly organized as the Zulus, and when it came time to subjugate Zululand the Europeans had a magazine rifle. Now just suppose that a smoothbore period European army, the conservative kind that Frederick the Great or Wellington would have recognized, did clash with a powerful native barbarism in . . .

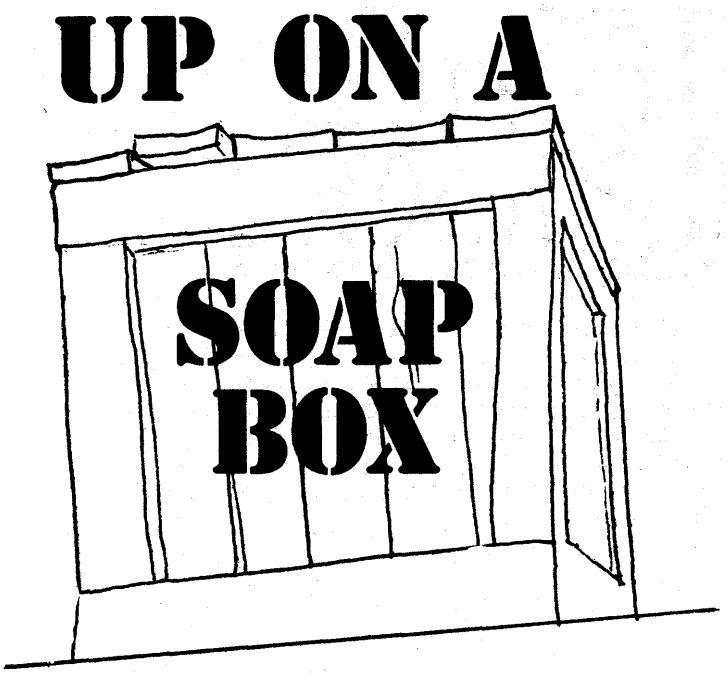
The Antillian Colonial War—1827

This one requires that we first postulate the existence of Antillia, that mid-Atlantic island-mythical as Atlantis—with which cartographers decorated their maps until well into the nineteenth century. Given an Antillia, what colonial power might be tempted to intervene? Any number would do, but since we are dealing with a mythical isle, I prefer a plausible, but mythical, European power. Let's say, therefore, that Harold Godwinsson triumphed at Hastings, defeating William the Loser. Given this, we find in the first quarter of the nineteenth century not a Great, but what might be called a Lesser Britain, represented by the Kingdom of Wessex.

Now, let them colonize Antillia—at their peril!

The basis for all of these imaginative flights is the study of history. Some would-be wargamers downgrade the more time-consuming aspects of the hobby-organizational research and quality painting craftsmanship, for two examples. These people bone up on complicated rules and use *their* imaginations to suppose that they are skillful and respected practitioners of the table-top general's art. This is not so. Knowledge is the thing to respect in a wargamer, not batting averages. It doesn't matter how well you know a certain set of rules but how well you know the period in which you play. The above scenarios could not have been realized without a heavy commitment to the study of history, and wargamers who neglect these studies might as well be checker-players.

From this it follows that one of the most important possessions of the imaginative wargamer must be his library. Wargamers should read history—and not necessarily just military history either. The gamer who is also a history buff has a decided advantage over one who is not. In the first place, the history-buff gamer's imagination is likely to be more finely honed and certainly better balanced than that of the gamer who reads nothing but published rules and wargaming commentary. With a better balance in the realm of facts, therefore, the buff gamer is also a more well-rounded individual. He avoids the narrow parochialism and ludicrous monomania which is discrediting to the hobby and frequently so embarassing to other participants. Have you ever gamed with some tight-lipped rule freak to whom the outcome of a table-top contest counted as a test of manhood? Pitiful! What small manhood to test, and how likely it is that such people have mastered nothing *but* the rules, which they use as their "equalizer" not only in wargaming but in life in general.



Wargaming: A Moral Issue?

Theron Kuntz

Today a new breed of avid and maniacal gamer indulges in competitive games describe as wargames. Each wargamer commands his side in a board game, his troops in a miniature game, hi personage in a role-playing game. During the course of each contest, known to wargamers as battles or adventures, opponents will lose playing pieces, such as cardboard counters, metal or plastic figures, or illusionary characters. Rules are used to govern restrictions, movement, advancement, and how particular pieces are lost and gained throughout the course of a wargame. Emotions, which are the byproduct of gaming, are produced during the course of a contest through successes and failures.

In 1976 E. Gary Gygax, the father of modem role-playing games, offered his definition of wargaming as "a mental competition according to [prescribed] rules with opponents in direct opposition to each other, [creating] situations which simulate warfare, hostility, conflict or antagonism, wherein specific instructions are given and choice of moves are allowed with the object being to minimize losses and maximize gains." Unfortunately, not all particular wargame enthusiasts are able to "minimize losses and maximize gains." Frequently, wargames allow individual players to display some extreme prodigality, giving bystanders the impression that wargamers are nothing but impassive warmongers who are bent upon destruction, with all its violent emotions, whatever the cost may be. These "war-moralizers" feel that a new race of fascists and communists will be born, with the instinctive impressions that war and its wastefulness is the way of life. Moreover, other groups of "war-moralizers" say that wargaming is an act of practicing the willful murder of mankind condemned by God. And all of this moralizing comes from just playing a game!

Sometimes one wonders whether or not the moralizers draw the line between the realistic and the facetious. Many obviously lack knowledge (and are injudicious) of the game and the gamer, which has led to adverse first impressions and appearances.

Wargames are games! There is no difference between a wargame and a Monopoly game when it comes down to the actual competition between opponents. Players in either game compete to win as their major goal. And why not? Would you play a game to lose despite the fact that you could possibly win? Certainly not, unless one's lack of self-confidence and excessive modesty leads to self-sacrifice for another's benefit; and this type of sacrifice only blinds one's true capabilities and possible achievements from himself and others as well. So as a matter of point, players compete to win, not necessarily to lose, in any particular game, whether it be wargames or games like Life, Monopoly, football, or basketball. This, as part of a whole, helps explain the wargamer's devotion to his hobby.

Emotions have a role in wargaming also. No matter who you are—Christian or Stoic—you will display some level of emotion, internal or external, whether you win or lose a game. And the degree of emotions exhibited in any particular case will range from gladness and ecstasy to despair and anger.

If a pro golfer misses a ten-foot putt and then proceeds to deliberately and forcibly throw his putter to the green, he is displaying an external expression of his discontent at missing that particular shot. There is little difference between the golfer who is imbued with grief and anger at missing an important putt, or the wargamer who is imbued with grief and anger after losing one of his Napoleonic cavalry regiments. Both competitors are humans; both competitors have emotions. No matter what the game, as long as there are passionate humans, there will be emotions of different types and degrees exhibited in competition.

The average wargamer is a highly vivid and intellectual individual. Most are self-centered, humanistic, and scrupulous; many are altruistic and ideological—wargamers are not only artists and mathematicians but also scientists and tacticians. Sometimes hundred of pages of rules must be memorized before playing one aspect of a particular period or era a contestant is specializing in. Books must be collected to review interests in all periods of warfare.

Finally, to castigate the wargamer as a warmonger is, in all practicality, to do likewise to all other competitors. The wargamer competes to win (or lose) as do other competitors, whether the hobby is board games or sports. The wargamer is a human, and therefore has emotions as do other competitors. The wargamer is a vivid person, endowed with both humanistic and ideological ideals, and so is the other competitor.

Those who wish to condemn wargaming—not because it's a game, but because it deals with war—are ignorant and imprudent, and should be labelled "crassmongers." These people disclaim and picket warfare through illusionary means since, obviously, realistic means of denouncing war are not possible against their present societal status.

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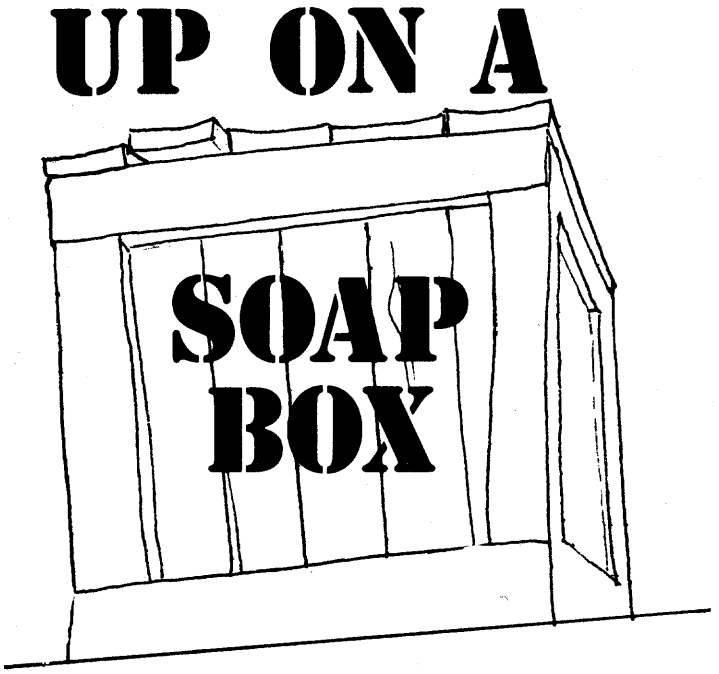

Painted Ladies & Potted Monks

Larry DiTillio

"The room is illuminated by light of a provocative, scarlet hue. The air is musky, smoky, honey-sweet. A luxurious carpet of thick, black fur covers the floor and in the center of it is a pedestal which has a golden bowl affixed to it. The four walls are adorned with lurid reliefs of men, women and other creatures locked in all manner of sensuous embrace. An unseen voice speaks as the party of adventurers enters. 'Seek Ye Fulfillment?', it asks . . . "

This room is one of thirteen which constitute the first level of a dungeon adventure I call The Inn of Ootah. The purpose of it should be clear to even a hobbit-sized imagination. Once a party enters, the unseen voice offers them a choice of delicacies and if the heroes and heroines care to view these, then shimmering, colored forceportals open in the walls. Behind these portals exotic women and men (The E.R.A. already passed in my world) beckon seductively. If a character is interested, he or she renders payment to the golden bowl, there is a spurt of obscuring gas and in place of gold is a heart-shaped talisman that permits a single party member entry through the forceportal opted for. Once through, the portal closes and the hardy soul is left quite alone with the delicacy of his choice. What occurs then is strictly between me and the character who has entered, though of course he or she has the option to kiss and tell, IF and when he/she returns.

I originally constructed the Inn of Ootah as a personal campaign game. The participants in my campaign are all adults, well past the age of consent and fairly sophisticated in their approach to play. The room I have just described would cause them no shock or embarrassment, they'd simply take it as it was and "seek fulfillment" according to their mood.

Recently, however, I carted the Inn along on a trip to GrimCon, a fresh addition to the West Coast fantasy-gaming scene. I intended to run it for three friends who moved north from L.A. to San Francisco and who are all devoted *D&Ders* without a campaign to play in. My idea was to use my friends' campaign characters as a core group and recruit other players from those attending the con. This was easy enough to accomplish, but the resultant play left me with some rather heady food for thought, and this nourishment prompted me to share some conclusions with some of you older DMs out there.

As we all know, a large percentage of those who enjoy fantasy gaming are youngsters between the age of 12 and 16. They appear in gargantuan hordes at every con, madly seeking games in a fashion that is best described as True Chaotic. DMs in their 20s 30s and 40s often shun these kids as players, or patronize them contemptuously, attitudes I find distasteful to say the least.

Younger dungeon-delvers bring a fresh, uncynical viewpoint to the game that augments the fun of it, and if in their exuberance they tend to talk all at once this is understandable. Any adult DM who can't control 5 or 6 prepubescent lads by means other than the Instant Balrog Gambit should check out his own means of relating to people. Besides, there are plenty of players out of their teens who can be just as obnoxious (or even more so). By the same token, there are certain stumbling blocks inherent in DMing for younger players, particularly if you are as fond of role-play as I am.

Take, for example, that scarlet-hued room with the black carpet. When the party entered, my friends were instantly delighted, but the players I had "picked up" sat there with mouths agape. There were five of them, the oldest about 14, and it was painfully apparent that not one of them had ever encountered a dungeon room where outright sensual activity was offered. Ferocious monsters they could deal with, traps that sliced off limbs they could face jauntily, but painted ladies beckoning absolutely stunned them. There were a few nervous giggles and one kid, playing a Paladin, reacted with extravagantly Paladinish shock, covering his eyes to blot out the "filth" on the walls.

Nevertheless, a few moments later when a mage and a fighter (both played by my adult pals) essayed the shimmering portals to glean what, uh, "information" they could from the ladies within, this same Paladin grew extremely interested. I could see a struggle taking place within the lad, and sure enough, after a while he inquired if partaking of the "delicacies" would be against his alignment. His pals giggled some more, but the question floored me. I suddenly realized that here I was, 31 years old, the product of a, shall we say, "liberated" New York City youth, and this 14 year-old was asking me if an act of sex was evil.

For one frightening moment I was in a situation of responsibility that related to more than just a game of D&D.

Think about it, you adult DMs. Think how your fantasy activity touches your real life, then consider yourself at 14 when everything you did loomed large in the way you continued to live. If you'd been a D&D fanatic at the time, I would guess many of your attitudes toward right and wrong would have been molded by your game experience, even if only subconsciously. It flashed through my mind that in some way my answer would have an influence on this youthful Paladin and his friends as well, not in their game lives but in their actual growing up. Gad, save vs. responsibility!

The answer I finally gave wasn't profound but it was honest. I told him if he considered sex evil it was, though in my opinion it wasn't. He thought about it, still a tad nervous. He asked if perhaps he could go into one of the portals and not do anything. I allowed as he could, if he wanted to blow 40 gold pieces.

At about this time the fighter and mage appeared back in the room, both professing to feel "weaker" though both had had a "real good" time. The Paladin begged off and not one of the other kids had even dared to consider such goings-on, so the party left the room. The encounter, however, roamed around my greymatter for the remainder of the convention. I was having thoughts about D&D that had never occurred to me previously.

In the same game another incident occurred, again with that same Paladin player. This one involved a mysterious monk smoking a substance from a hookah which he offered to certain party members. My friends accepted somewhat overeagerly, while the Paladin again asked me that question. Was smoking a drug against his alignment? Now, I'm not a junkie, nor do I think drugs are of any benefit to teen-agers (no high is as good as your own natural openness to things at that age), but I have had a good deal of experience with a whole gamut of consciousness-altering substances and would be hard pressed to declare them categorically evil.

I therefore opted for the same answer regarding drugs as I had given regarding sex, namely, if he thought they were evil then they were. I myself did not consider them so. He obviously feared drug use less than he did sex (natural for a 14-year-old), because he took the toke offered. The result was a three-turn zombieized state during which he enjoyed some vivid, though not unpleasant, hallucinations regarding holy symbols and the like. Of course, he had to be walked around during this time and wasn't of much help when the party was attacked by two doombats shortly after.

"That'll teach you to get stoned on an expedition," said one of his friends self-righteously, but it didn't faze him. I think he actually enjoyed his pseudo-high, and this fact really set my brain machinery in gear. I had begun with a nice, amiable kid who seemed to hold the belief that sex and drug use were inherently evil things and in the course of our mutual gaming I opened his head to the POSSIBILITY that this was not always so. My personal moral viewpoint had been passed on in an unthreatening manner to a boy who might very well be influenced by it at such time as those areas crossed his life.

I fully realize that my Paladin friend is intelligent enough to make his own decisions in these matters; nevertheless, I can't help feeling that our role-playing interaction will have an effect on those decisions. In D&D we PLAY a character, but invariably that character contains elements of our own selves. For adults, those selves are already firmly fixed; for younger players those selves are still being shaped by EVERY experience they have, INCLUDING *D&D*. The game becomes not only a leisure activity, it becomes a teaching instrument as well.

A young man or woman running through an adventure charted by an adult is open to picking up attitudes of that adult in regard to certain activities. The most evident of such activities is killing. Every melee involves killing, generally in a black-and-white manner, i.e. those orcs are evil and deserve to die and besides, they'll slay us if we don't slay them. Fine, no problem. Most young players will never have to face a need to kill in real life, assuming that the powers that be are not insane enough to start another major war. Despite this, a DM should stress that killing is the least preferable solution to conflict, avoiding the tendency to glorify life-taking.

On the other hand, these young players will in real life face sexual encounters, drug use, racial prejudice, religious crisis, political corruption and numerous meetings with other human beings who may very well be of "evil" alignment. At the moment of such confrontations, all their experiences will carry weight, fantasy experiences as well as real. The more open-minded a DM is in providing such real-life simulations in a dungeon, the more his players will pick up reasonable attitudes toward the very real evils of life. Role-playing is meant to do this and *D&D* is a legitimate arena for espousing the good.

I don't mean you should forego the thrill of fang, talon, claw and sword, I only suggest you balance it with good role-play of a SIGNIFICANT nature. One good-aligned helpful character who happens to be gay can change a passel of bigoted attitudes that have no basis. Adding racial strains that are not lily-white to your world goes a long way in telling an impressionable youngster that black, brown, yellow, red and even blue-skinned people are not all that different and shouldn't be feared or hated. (If you think I emphasize this too much, take a gander around you at the next convention and see how many races other than Caucasian are present.).

Having the belief in a God or Goddess be the key factor in sustaining a player's life goes a long way in showing that religious faith can be of real value in the world. Use of a drug that addicts a character with horrible consequences says more than any dry lecture about the real dangers of drug abuse.

I am not saying you should go heavy-handed on this. Nobody's looking for a message in every dungeon room. The point is, a message can be delivered, light-heartedly and subtly, and it can HELP a person who has yet to go through what you already have faced.

We older DMs didn't have *D&D* when we were that age, but the generation following us does. They will learn from us, if we dare to teach. The result will be better, more imaginative gaming for all of us, and just possibly we might even build a real world where dice are the *only* means of killing and hatred is only vented on Evil High Priests. The power to promote weal exists. I intend to use it and have fun in doing so.

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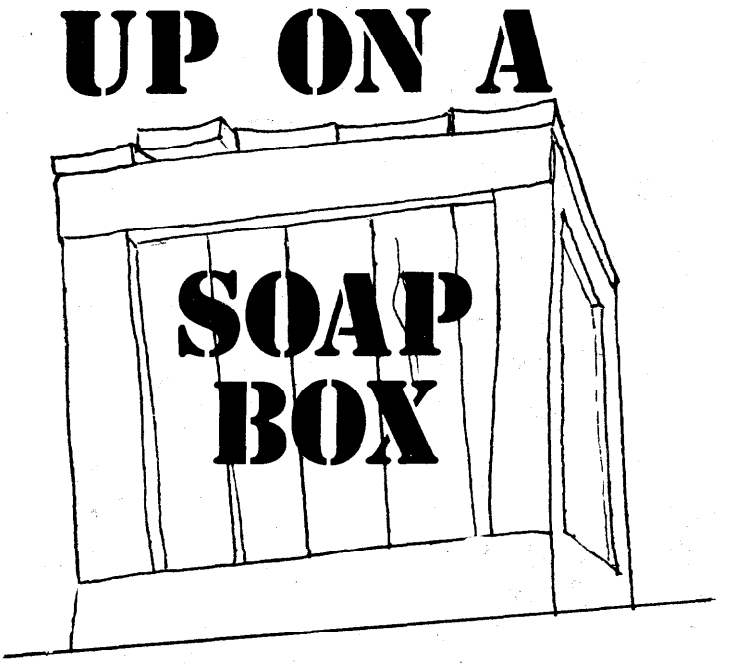

Magical systems:
Rationale and reconciliation

Kristan J. Wheaton

Magic is always something to be reckoned with in the worlds of *Dungeons & Dragons*. There are as many systems of magic as there are universes created by the individual Dungeon Master. Some are well thought out but many are makeshift and haphazard. The purpose of this article is to define a system which will help merge the varied concepts of magic into a more cohesive, understandable format.

Initially, some general definitions must be examined. The basic premise behind magic is that it is an energy; pliant and elusive, to be sure, but energy nonetheless. The practice of magic is basically the controlling and directing of this energy. Sometimes it becomes a force, as in a lightning bolt, while at other times it will be a director of forces, a catalyst, as it were, as in an ice storm. The concept of magic as energy should be easily understood, as it is almost universal among Dungeon Masters.

Now that an outline for the definition of magic has been developed, one must turn to the Magic User in order to comprehend the entire system. The Magic User is merely one who attempts to understand the energy of magic. His role is analogous to any scientist. Just as the physicist attempts to understand the physical forces about him, a Magic User tries to comprehend the intensity of magic. With this perspective, it is obvious that magic must grow in the same manner that science evolved between the times of Aristotle and Einstein.

There are two basic schools of magical systems. The first is the "slow and steady" school. Its proponents claim that magical power comes through research; that the Magic User is a passive character, confined to his tower, with only brief sojourns to collect more research material. His control of the energy comes through exhaustive incantations coupled with time-consuming preparations.

The second school consists of those who believe in "quick-draw" magic. In this system, control of the energy is on the Magic User's fingertips. His incantations are used only to define the form the magic will take. Research does not play a large role because the extent of his present knowledge is so large that research is almost counterproductive. His is the role of the "combat" Magic User.

Both ideologies are as viable as they are congruent, to the point of absolute harmony. The basic fallacy of those who see contradictions between the two schools is that they envision magic as a static system. However, if magic is truly an energy form, then the knowledge of the use of magic must have evolved, just as the knowledge of the operation of the universe has evolved. Those of the first school view magic as Renaissance man may have seen physics, while those of the latter discipline see the Magic User as we might imagine the physicist of the future.

> *"... it is obvious that magic must grow in the same manner that science evolved between the times of Aristotle and Einstein."*

The differences are as simple as the differences between pure and applied, the known and the unknown, research and practice. If one envisions an evolution of magic, then either of the two systems—or anything in between—becomes a viable option to the Dungeon Master.

Thus it can be seen that all Magic Users, as well as systems of magic, can be placed within the parameters of an evolutionary scale. A question still remains: If the premises to this general system of magic are correct, then what conclusions can be drawn? The answer to this question is beyond the scope of this article; however, the premises mentioned so blithely in the above question can be examined. Although several questions come to mind, the major argument is one from Law and Chaos.

With magic defined as an energy and with the constant references and analogies to science, one might think that magic could be expressed as a series of laws, thus leaving no place for the Chaotic Magic User. This is correct, to a point. Magic can be expressed as law, but not completely or ultimately. The Lawful Magic User has a greater ability to direct magical energy. His laws allow him to use magic effectively and with constant results. However, he can never really control or understand magic in the same way a Chaotic Magic User can. Magic is an energy that is random by nature. This allows those who subscribe to the Chaotic alignment to control magical energy to a greater degree, by virtue of their more thorough understanding of that energy. Magic is such a flexible energy that only a Chaotic can fully appreciate the nuances and vagaries of its form.

> *"Magic is such a flexible energy that only a Chaotic can fully appreciate the nuances and vagaries of its form."*

The discussion of magic in the preceding paragraphs as an evolutionay process has rationalized those systems of magic which were formerly at odds. All systems of magic are in harmony with one another, given the broad parameters of the evolutionay system and the infinite extension of alternate universes. The major conflict between Law and Chaos's ultimate use of magic is resolved by understanding that Law may direct magic more effectively, while Chaos has the ability to control magic due to the thorough understanding of the basic unordered nature of the energy.

Magic can be as simple or as complex, as random or as defined, as the individual wants it to be. However, the source and variety of magic must be at least partially understood for it to be fully appreciated when incorporated into a campaign.

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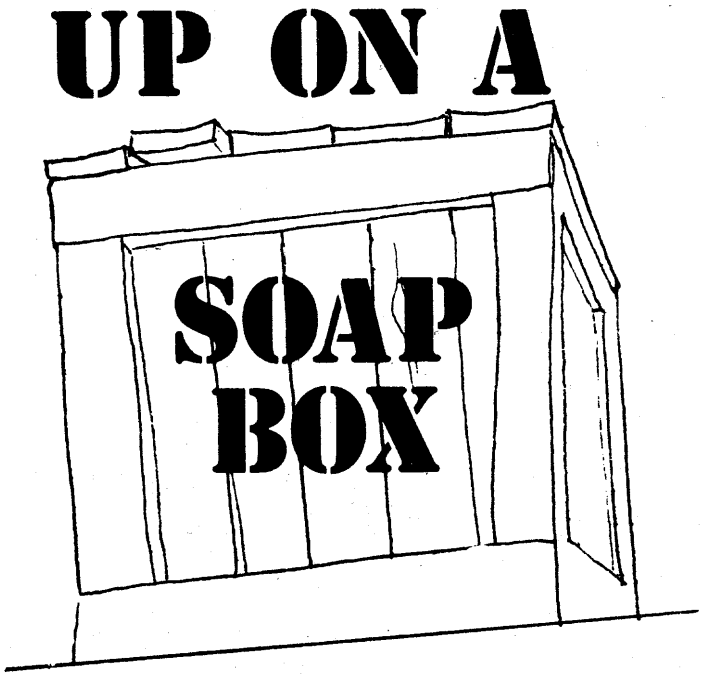

The problem of morality in fantasy

Douglas P. Bachmann

Larry DiTillio's article in *The Dragon* #36, "Painted Ladies & Potted Monks," was quite thought-provoking. In that article, Mr. DiTillio raised some interesting questions which touch the deeper dimensions of role playing. In short, he suggested that we are doing a bit more than "playing"; we are forming attitudes toward real life.

It is the intention of this article to push beyond the conclusion of Mr. DiTillio's piece. If statements in this article give him some rough handling, it is not out of contempt. Mr. DiTillio deserves our thanks and respect for his sensitivity to the effects his game was having on younger players and for his attempt to respond to those effects in a responsible manner.

The exchange between the DM and the shy Paladin which Mr. DiTillio relates needs some examination. The Paladin asked if engaging in (what appears to have been) some gratuitous sexual titillation was or was not a violation of his character's alignment. The DM responded by saying that "if he considered sex evil it was, though in [the DM's] opinion it wasn't." The DM responded on the level of right and wrong. The point here is that the question was not about right or wrong; it was about the appropriate response of a character. The question was: Do Paladins engage in such activities? The question was not: Is it right or wrong? The question that was actually asked was straight out of Faerie. The DM's reponse was direct from Poughkeepsie. It is important to hear what is actually being asked as we play games; the rules of the game may be different than the rules of "real life. "

Please permit a short digression here. Faerie, or Elfland, is a strange world. It is not familiar or comfortable to us. It is weird, awe-ful, wonder-ful. Anything which comes directly out of "real life" is from Poughkeepsie; it is comfortable, familiar, plastic, ultimately trivial and boring. The art of Fantasy is not concerned with real-life evil, or science, or quickies or getting high. It is concerned with the profound mystery behind and within life, nature and the human soul. Anytime you sense "real life" creeping into a fantasy game, you know that the Poughkeepsie Factor is at work. So ends the digression.

What can we make of the answer to the Paladin's question? Was the answer adequate even in "real life" terms? I cannot see that it was. Is something right just because we think it is right? If Hitler feels that it is right for him to kill six million Jews, is that morally acceptable? Was the Inquisition right because the Pope said it was? It seems to me that this kind of relativistic morality is untenable. My own suspicion is that people accept such relativity either because they have not given the matter sufficient thought, or because they wish to avoid the moral claim or issue which is implicit in a given situation or decision.

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In spite of expressing a relativistic morality, Mr. DiTillio later communicates a sincere desire to provide "real life situations in a dungeon" which will enable players to "pick up reasonable attitudes toward the very real evils of life." He wants to use games as teaching devices by espousing "real life" good. Although such charitable impulses are to be applauded, they drag us out of Faerie back into Poughkeepsie.

I do not wish to say that we cannot learn some lessons from Fantasy, but I would argue that Fantasy is not designed to teach us anything. If someone uses a fantasy game or novel as a soap box or a pulpit, that person has perverted Fantasy and has turned a form of art into a form of propaganda or pornography.

Fantasy will not tolerate teaching or preaching. Nor will Faerie accept the imposition of moral concerns from "real life." Nevertheless, there is an inherent morality to Fantasy. It is not a morality of law, but a morality of being.

The assumption underlying all Fantasy is that a character is going to become a hero or a heroine. The potential hero begins as a normal person, unprepared to do the work that he must do, unworthy of the dignity which properly will be his at the completion of his task. In order to do his work and face the final terror, the hero must grow—in strength, courage, dignity and wisdom. In short, he must experience an inner transformation.

There is a mythic structure which embodies this transformation. It is summarized here from Joseph Campbell's *The Hero* with a Thousand Faces: "The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadowy presence which guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers).

If someone uses a fantasy game or novel as a soap box or a pulpit, that person has. . . turned a form of art into a form of propaganda or pornography.

"When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred mother), his recognition by the father-creator

(father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again—if the powers have remained unfriendly to him-his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon he brings restores the world (elixir)."

I believe this pattern is one of the essential forms of Fantasy and that it contains within it an inherent morality.

Beyond this inner dynamic, the task set for the hero is his alone. It is a work only he can do for the benefit of the world. If he fails, the world will die or be enslaved. The character will become a hero by accepting the role fate has set for him and by fulfilling the task he must perform. The hero, then, has a significant part to play in the World History of Faerie.

Whatever contributes to the hero's growth toward nobility is good; whatever contributes to his regression is evil. If he does something which imperils his mission (thereby putting his world in peril), he is foolish—perhaps criminally foolish. If he acts in a way which promotes his mission he acts wisely.

From this, we can conclude that without a world within which to work and for which to work, there would be no morality in Fantasy. If we play out dungeon adventures which have no vital connection to a world hanging in the balance, if a player cannot find a place for himself in the whole epic of history, then there is no imperative to do anything and there is no reason to refrain from doing anything. Everything is then truly relative.

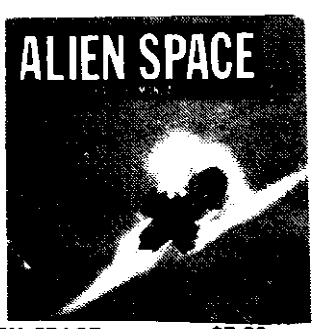
Game objectives, as they now exist in *AD&D* and even *C&S*, only permit a character to grow in power. As long as games define significant activity solely in terms of the acquisition of power, we will h&e no morality. If games begin to allow experience points or something like them for growth indignity or nobility, then we will begin to move toward the morality inherent in Fantasy.

When that begins to happen, we will be able to ask questions. What does it mean to be a noble Warrior/Mage/Cleric/Thief/Paladin, etc.? What kind of behavior is appropriate for my character? What are *my* Paladin's deep wishes? For what does he seek and yearn? What really satisfies him or fulfills him? Given his role in the world, how might he act his best? When we answer these questions for ourselves, we will begin to formulate a morality.

As a player will need to continually ask if certain actions are worthy of his character, so a DM will have to ask if certain situations are weighty enough to claim a place in Faerie. Gratuitous sex and pot smoking seem to fail that test. That is, they fail unless they are being used by a villain to lure some potential hero from his quest into dismal failure.

Mr. DiTillio's "scarlet hued room" seemed pointless—good for some kicks but ultimately signifying nothing. The "pseudo-high" he provided was dangerous because it meant that a character had surrendered his alertness, preparedness and awareness while in the Perilous Realm. A three-turn inability to fight is hardly a serious penalty for abandoning three virtues every hero must possess. Perhaps a combat penalty plus forbidding the acquisition of any experience points for 24 hours would have been more in keeping with the impact that getting stoned actually would have in Faerie. If you want significant/meaningful play, you have got to fashion a significant/meaningful world.

Finally, Mr. DiTillio calls upon older players to teach younger players, and thereby improve play. I do not share his faith. I am not overly impressed by the morality, holiness or sacrificial love embodied by my life or those of my contemporaries. But I do believe that as we struggle to discover the reality of Faerie and the proper forms of Fantasy, as we design game mechanics which are true to those realities, we will discover our souls, we will make ethical decisions . . . we will be transformed.



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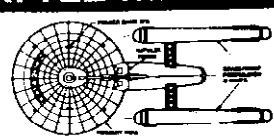

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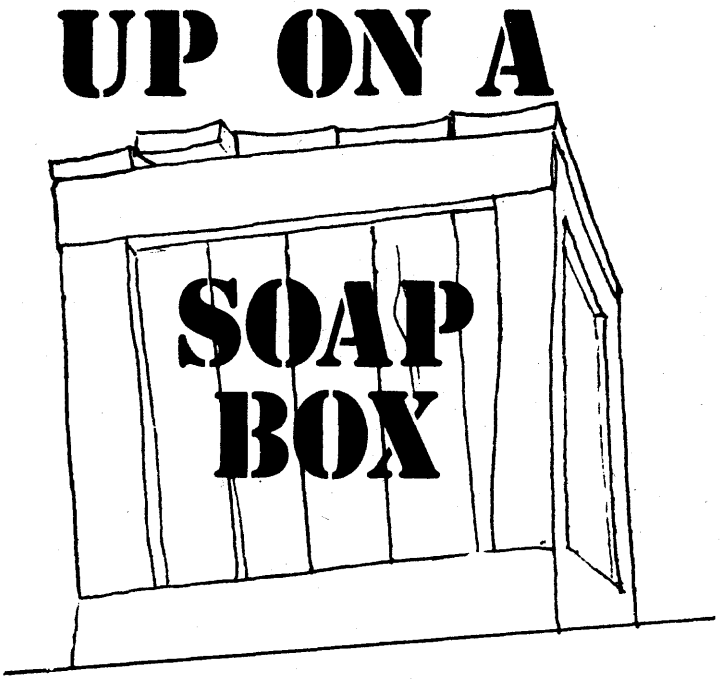


The art of good generalship

Terry L. Ford

Sometimes we wargamers lay too little emphasis on the role of nature in our games, and we miss some pleasure as a result. We fail to appreciate our games as more than tabletop or mapboard realities. When that happens, we, of all people, lack imagination, transcendental insight, and the art of generalship. If we very roughly paraphrase Clausewitz's definition of war as "policy carried out by force," then Generalship consists of achieving a defined political end through force applied in such a way that the enemy either prefers to concede the political point rather than prolong the conflict, or becomes unable to prolong it. Sometimes the political end is so obscure, as in some of the 18th-century European dynastic wars, that no decisive resolution results.

In any event, the method of applying this force constitutes the art of generalship. Whether the technology at hand is lasers, bombers, muskets, or spears, the goal is similar, the essence of generalship unchanged. The best generals exhibit an appreciation of Nature and a willingness to bow to her, where lesser generals ignore or oppose her. In this, good generals recognize a quality similar to the principles of judo, using forces outside one's own command by bowing to necessity, opposing force with absence, and applying force where it is unopposed.

In the most elementary form, we can see this principle at work when a primitive warrior hides behind a tree to surprise an enemy rather than await him in the open. The tree is there, so it is used for advantage, or more accurately, the advantage is there to be used if it is recognized. The primitive warrior meets his foe obliquely, not head-on. Ambush works on a much larger scale as a basic principle of warfare. Not only in the obvious areas of guerrilla fighting, supply-line raiding, and general skirmishing, but also at an army level, we find good generals making use of the ambush technique. Hannibal surprised the Romans by hiding men in a depression beside a river on open territory. The Romans, used to Gallic ambushes from woods, were taken by surprise when attacked from ambush on "open ground" at Trebia. Caesar also used ambush *en masse* when he posted troops under cover with orders to fall on Pompey's flank at Pharsalus. Americans need little reminder of the advantages of ambuscade, remembering as victims our colonial part in Braddock's defeat by the French and Indians, and the glamor of Morgan's Indian-fighting riflemen in the early days of our Revolution.

But, even used on a large scale, the major point about ambush is the general's ability to see the nature of the terrain and his instinct for letting land work to his advantage. This same quality of letting the land work for one is involved in a second technique of good generalship. Ambush requires the presence of complicated terrain. This second technique requires the opposite: vast emptiness. In preparation for his raid on Europe, the Persian monarch Darius entered the steppes north of the Black Sea to neutralize the Scythians to his rear. Darius had an army that had just created the biggest empire the world had ever known, and the nomads had scant chance of standing against it. So they didn't stand. They ran, and they burned everything behind them. Prairie fires were a natural answer to their "weakness." The Persians could never pin the Scythians to battle, and couldn't supply their own army in the desert the Scythians made of the steppes, so they retired. Nature had preserved the Scythians unconquered. Nothingness prevailed. The same technique was used against Napoleon, who was considered almost supernaturally undefeatable. The Russians withdrew, initiating a scorched-earth policy, and let distance and winter do their fighting. The result was that Napoleon met his first defeat at the hands of Nature, not at the hands of a Russian army inadequate to face the Grand Army.

The defeat of Crassus at the hands of the Parthians in 54 B.C. really belongs in this group of victories because Crassus insisted on marching his infantry across desert and they were worn and thirsty long before the Parthians skirmished them to death—again, the Parthians declined to stand and be slaughtered when the terrain allowed them to withdraw and weaken the enemy without close fighting until the fight could be made on Parthian terms against demoralized opponents.

Effective use of openness was made by Genghis Khan and Rommel when they used vastness as a means of complicating the enemy's transportation and supply, while transforming it into an ally of theirs. Mongols rode horses that used frozen rivers like freeways, ate off the land even in winter, and were ridden by men willing to eat raw meat in the saddle or drink horse blood. Distance and supply were nothing to them. The Sahara, similarly, became Rommel's best fort, and mobility his chief buckler.

Americans solved the problem of vastness in the Pacific during World War Two with the island-hopping strategy based on a proper understanding of Nature. We saw that huge water as being covered with stepping-stones we could make work for us, while the Japanese saw it as a barrier to us.

Far more frequently than open spaces, natural obstacles play a role in generalship. Mountain passes or the space between mountains and ocean can often be corked by troops as the Spartans attempted to do at Thermopylae and Marathon. At a strategic level, rivers and mountain ranges used to be considered ideal frontiers for a nation or empire. Italy and the Alps, Spain and the Pyrenees come immediately to mind. Just by being there, they impose difficulties on an enemy. Control of the Mississippi River was eventually recognized as a crucial strategic goal of the North in our Civil War because it cut off Confederate supplies from the West and because it provided quick transportation of Union troops. It was both a barrier and a highway, depending on the point of view.

This appreciation of the military value inherent in nature includes such varied things as hiding behind a bush in savage warfare and appreciating the strategic advantages of being an island nation such as Great Britain (the sea is a highway) or Japan (for long, the sea was a barrier). How do grand strategy and one-on-one scuffles all boil down to good generalship on the wargame table or mapboard? How does it apply?

First, the wholeness or unity of the game situation must be appreciated. A particular battle is part of a campaign, part of a war, aimed at securing or preventing certain political ends. This realization alone adds zest. The issue of slavery or states rights lies behind your Civil War battle. Not only are you fighting for a cause, but you

are paying a price— the tiny soldiers or paper counters represent goals and ends in the hearts of individuals. Is it worth the lives to be lost to hold the table, or should you slip away like the Scyths?

For example, I recently fought a table battle with a Celtic army against Greeks in a campaign situation representing the Galatian assault on Greece in the fourth century B.C. After having looted several towns, my force was laden with baggage and plunder. It had been mauled by Macedonians, and was hoping only to survive battle with the loot intact as it plodded back north. My tactics were dictated by that strategy. I chose rough, wooded terrain with many hills to make my stand. I sent out skirmishers, but ordered the main bands to hold until the enemy entered charge distance. Woods sheltered the most vulnerable targets while good dice rolls, and the campaign rules, produced a short battle of only seven turns. The result was that my army survived with plunder intact, and casualties were "acceptable." The greatest losses were among the charioteers, who could not fight a good defensive battle and so faced Greeks on the open portion of the battlefield. The light-medium infantry who skulked in the woods fared better.

Though the Greeks won the battle, they gained nothing for their fighting. This was especially true because Gallic losses could be replaced in the next campaign turn, and the Greeks had to await reinforcements from a long distance. Both the strategic and the tactical help that nature provided made it possible for the Gauls to survive. Too often we unquestioningly settle for a battleground like a football field and battles with no more relationship to natural help and hindrance than that most abstract of wargame fields, the chessboard.

The examples cited so far involve primarily the negative side of effective terrain use. It hinders the enemy to pass through woods and uphill and across creeks, rivers or ditches to reach you. It hinders his missiles if you are obscured by trees, bushes, banks or terraces. But nature supplies direct help to the perceptive wargamer as well. Much of the success of a wargame army depends upon getting the right forces to the right place to do the right job at the right time. Some map games and miniatures rules allow speed increases for using roads. Sometimes interior lines are available to you behind the shelter of hills so you can safely shuttle troops to the portion of the front that needs them most. Archers on a hillside get additional view, and sometimes range is increased, overhead support fire for friends possible, and they may fight melees with additional strength. Caesar describes the advantages of high ground to ancient troops very well in his *Gallic Wars,* and Quatre Bras and Gettysburg show that his evaluation has stood for centuries.

Openness can be to your advantage, as often as rougher terrain can be. Hannibal made perfect use of his cavalry superiority by meeting Romans on a plain, denuding them of their own cavalry and hitting them in the rear with his returning Numidian victors. Polybius claims Hannibal could do this because he had clear-cut numerical and qualitative cavalry superiority and was only outnumbered in infantry at Cannae. In this case open terrain, where cavalry could maneuver, worked to his advantage. The same was true for the Parthians who killed Crassus.

Mongols even managed to preserve "ambush" in totally open areas by detaching a portion of their force to arrive late on the battlefield, on the rear or flank (generally the left) of the by-then-engaged enemy. This was done so often that the concept became known as the "standard sweep." What happened was an example of using *time* rather than trees or hills as a cover for ambush.

Confederates at Bull Run used the railroad in a similar manner to get very distant troops into combat, a more technological application of the same principle.

The obvious tabletop application of this technique is to reserve troops off the table and roll dice to bring them on a later turn. In map games the scale is often large enough that a strategic rather than tactical "standard sweep" is an option. Some of the 20th-century and hypothetical-future wargames allow for paratroopers, marine invasion, or gravity sleds, the perfect modern tools for the sweep.

If your troops consist of much heavy cavalry or tanks or hovercraft (wargaming now includes a lot of futuristic stuff), you may benefit from that open space by maneuvering or by gaining speed for an uninhibited fast closing with the enemy if he can be overrun!

Most rules already allow you to use the terrain fairly realistically, and the ones that don't can be easily modified by agreement of the players. Our problem as wargamers is that we too seldom take more than uninspired advantage of the options open to us.

One of the most enjoyable battles I have ever fought was an experiment with *Legion* miniatures rules on a ping-pong-sized table covered with remarkably varied terrain. A fort was established at each end and troops were not revealed until they would be in line of sight of each other. My Gauls inhabited a forested region and Romans marched to reach the Gallic hillfort. (The Romans had a camp on the far—lengthwise-edge of the table.) Naturally, Gauls waited in ambush in woods along the road. Equally naturally, the Romans didn't march on the road—not being fools. Scouting became important, as did issuing new orders and trying to crest the right hill at the right time to get a shot or melee advantage. Eventually fighting occurred over walls (both the Gallic fort and Roman camp at one time or another were attacked), to the discomfort of the attackers. The game had a good sense of flowing with the nature of the land and the uncertainty of the manner in which the opponent would use the terrain was refreshingly challenging.

Having invested heavily in time and money in 25mm armies, I am not eager to shift to 15's, but the scope they offer for grand strategic use of terrain on a limited-size table appeals, and the opportunities for good generalship would seem to be even greater.

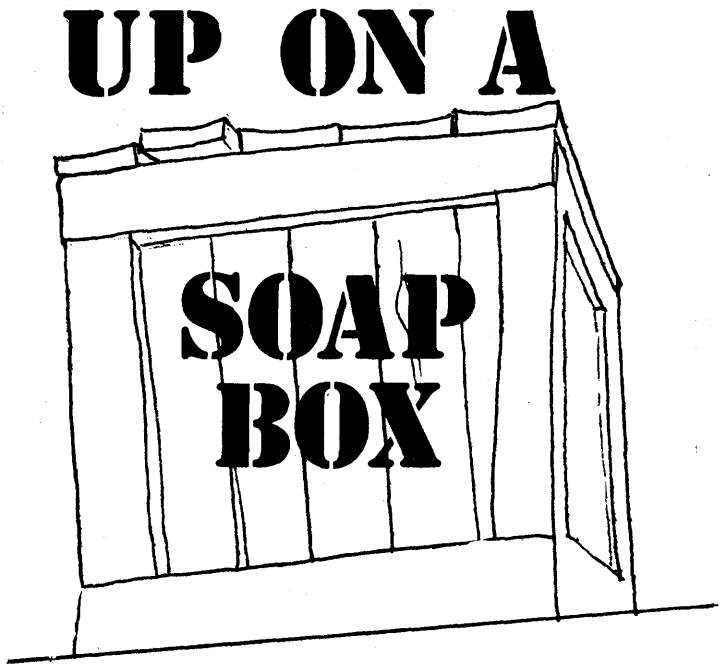
Having spoken throughout this article of "Nature" in terms of terrain, one more caution is required. Human nature is nature also, and an army has its own nature as well. Operating in violation of these natures is as reprehensible and prone to draw down misfortune as misuse of terrain. The obvious example is the use of "barbarian" miniatures armies. They often go into uncontrolled advance toward the enemy, so rather than try to avoid it, one is often better off to make those Gauls or Goths close with the enemy as quickly as they can. Use fairly large units and trade whacks with gusto. You know you will not be more maneuverable than the opposing regulars, but you can (if the dice rolls go well) hit with the force of a whirlwind. If that happens in an unexpected place on the enemy's front (or flank or rear) you have done all a good general could hope to do with the troops available.

Playing Metagaming's Ogre with one super-tank of the future against powered armor infantry, gravity sleds, and various armored units, I at first made the mistake of avoiding combat and running toward the enemy command post, without taking into account "cybertank psychology." I am more often successful by letting the unspeakably powerful machine gleefully assault the nearest enemy, detouring whenever it can run over infantry, smash lesser armor or launch a missile at a pursuer. It works better than singleminded beelining because it is more appropriate to the "army" of one supertank. Good generalship for this game involves spirited aggression.

In both miniatures and board games you may find your French Napoleonics most successful if you trust their elan. Your British fare better standing coolly in line firing. These qualities are often built right into the game in National Characteristics rules. Even where they exist, you would do well to imitate Wellington and place your thin red lines behind the crest of a hill out of artillery's way, and your French will fight better charging downhill; or if the terrain is rough, thick swarms of skirmishers may be more to the French taste than columns up front.

The thing to be gained from all this is a greater zest for your wargame. Troops acting in harmony with the terrain, and their own special qualities, will necessarily be more successful than troops that ignore their surroundings and "inner natures."

You will find your battles becoming more individual, more compelling, displaying greater variety and at the same time proceeding more "realistically." The truism that "no battle plan survives contact with the enemy" still stands, but taking account of nature will allow you more often to achieve the apotheosis of United States Civil War generalship and "hit 'em where they ain't."



Apples, oranges, role-playing and morality

by Larry DiTillio

In *Dragon #39,* Douglas P. Bachmann wrote a piece on morality in fantasy which he says was prompted by my views in The *Dragon #36.* I am replying to that piece for two reasons: 1) Mr Bachmann made several unfounded assumptions about my game world and 2) I believe Mr. Bachmann did not truly tackle the notion of responsibility in DMing.

Let's get the assumptions out of the way quickly, since they are really personal pique. Assumption One is made in an examination of an exchange between myself as Dungeon Master and a young boy who was playing a Paladin at a pick-up game I ran at an area convention. The exchange related to sexual activity as it affected the player character's alignment, and I used it as an example of natural sexual curiosity manifesting itself in the human experience of game-playing. My reply to the boy's question, for the record, was that if he considered sex to be evil, then it was, but that I personally didn't consider it evil. Mr. Bachmann stated that I misinterpreted the question and went on to state what the boy was REALLY asking. I find this mildly annoying since I was, after all, present at the time and Mr. Bachmann was nowhere around. I know what question was asked; I experienced the situation I "reported."

Mr. Bachmann further states that real-life situations have no place in fantasy, but then describes my answer to the boy as unacceptable in real-life. He cites Hitler's holocaust and the Inquisition as proof that just because someone perceives an action as acceptable, it is not necessarily right. I submit that sexual morality is very open to relativity and in general does boil down to the personal belief that certain sexual activity is either right or wrong and therefore acceptable or not. To compare sexual morality to the "morality" of mass murder is to commit the apples-oranges fallacy of logic; i.e., there is no sound basis for comparison.

Assumption Two on Mr. Bachmann's part is that the scenarios involving sex and drugs that I used as examples were created for mere gratuitous titillation. Again I am annoyed, since Mr. Bachmann has no basis for judging this. He is not one of my players, he does not know the overall world view of my campaign and he does not know what context those scenarios appeared in. Were we to sit down and talk, he might discover that both scenarios fit into his own pattern of morality in fantasy.

I sincerely believe that Mr. Bachmann could have written his article without mentioning me at all, and I believe he was not justified in dismissing my creations as "pointless" and "gratuitous" without knowing all the facts. Moreover, I suffered all the more intensely since Mr. Bachmann used my personal experience without giving the reader the slightest inkling of his own. Is Mr. Bachmann writing from the viewpoint of a younger player or an older player, as DM or as delver? I think it would help to know this.

Now, on to more pressing matters—namely, that ole demon responsibility. I can accept Mr. Bachmann's "inherent morality of being" in fantasy, but I have trouble with the notion that "fantasy is not designed to teach us anything" and "If someone uses a fantasy game or novel as a soapbox or pulpit that person has perverted Fantasy and turned a form of art into a form of propaganda or pornography." (It is somewhat ironic, of course, that both our articles appeared in a column entitled "Up On a Soapbox"). I don't believe that all teaching is propaganda, just as I don't believe that all sex is pornography. I may have got a bit pretentious in "Painted Ladies and Potted Monks" by claiming older DM's could and should teach younger players about the "real evils" of life. Allow me to confess that and then clarify my stance here. By "teaching" in the context of *AD&D* I meant providing role-play situations that allowed (as opposed to forcing) dialogue on real life. The crux of this is that a DM who has had experience in certain areas can share that experience with younger players who have not had the same experience.

Role-playing is not a new concept in society, despite the fact that it is a fairly recent innovation in gaming. When I was discussing *AD&D* once with an older friend (a corporate executive turned successful sculptor), he told me about the use of role-playing games in corporations to promote better relationships between executives. These were not *AD&D* games, but in essence were surprisingly similar. The psycho-drama technique, a more intense form of role-play, is used in the field of psychology to deal with deep-rooted traumas and other emotional problems. They may be well too "Poughkeepsie" for Mr. Bachmann, but I do not believe it invalidates the premise that fantasy games can teach attitudes about life to younger players.

When Mr. Bachmann further states that sex and drugs are not weighty enough for inclusion in fantasy gaming, I feel he misses the specific point of responsibility to younger players. I made it clear that there are areas of significant concern to young players only—and it was not my intention to preach morality in these cases, but rather to foster dialogue on the subjects by not categorizing them as intrinsically evil.

Mr. Bachmann stated that he was going beyond my conclusions, but he was in fact going in a different direction than I was. His concern was an overall concept of morality in fantasy, while my article was a description of specific areas in the actual experience of role-playing. What he did do was change practical to theoretical, or more simply, take a "way-it-should-be" approach to a "way-it-is" discussion.

Please, please do not misinterpret that statement. I am not saying Mr. Bachmann is wrong and I am right. It would be impossible to do so since once again we are faced with comparing apples and oranges. Mr. Bachmann's inherent fantasy morality is a very broad, general area; indeed, morality is defined as "a set of codes for virtuous conduct" (Random House Collegiate Dictionary). My "teaching through role play" was concerned with general morality

only in espousing *examination* of the codes of virtuous conduct & they exist in reality and as they are symbolized in fantasy. However, to speak directly to Mr. Bachmann's moral viewpoint, I dealt with other areas besides sex and drugs which Mr. Bachmann does not mention at all. These were summarized in the beginning of this article. One of the key areas to consider is the killing that is an intrinsic part of *AD&D*, I wish Mr. Bachmann had included my views on a DM who glorifies life-taking (I am against it), or for that matter my ideas about racism in *AD&D* (Is black always the color of evil in your games?).

Playing *AD&D* as primarily a role-playing game is not all that easy. Many DMs can't handle situations not clearly covered in game mechanics, and many players are shy about "overacting." Mr. Bachmann has a good idea about offering experience for growth in nobility and dignity instead of for growth in power; however, such a concept must come from the individual DM, since to try to include it in a game system would lead to problems; an Assassin player's nobility and dignity would perforce be vastly different from a Paladins. However, as a point of information, the role-playing game *Bushido* does provide experience for honor as reflected in the Japanese concept of On, or "face." I further wish that Mr. Bachmann had been a little less abstract in his views and offered us at least one example of the type of mechanics or role-play situations he desires. I would sincerely be interested in seeing such an example, and I am certain Mr. Bachmann could provide it.

I am firmly of the opinion that increased role-play is the key to better *AD&D* and I also believe that role-play can only be fostered by the DM who is willing and able to set up more elaborate situations, no matter what areas those situations encompass. If the sword is the only answer in each and every encounter, then *AD&D* becomes a cut-and-dried wargame. My method of achieving more role-play is to use experience from real life that players have a basis for relating to; players may still react in ways they wouldn't in real life, simply to vicariously experience that way of reacting.

All literature, mythology, fantasy—and, yes, gaming—is an extension or elaboration of reality. We cannot play exclusively on the ethereal plane, nor can we spend all our game time buying equipment in city shops (a "reality" situation that I often find boring, but that many players really enjoy).

I believe there is a place for Larry DiTillio's "Poughkeepsie" and Douglas Bachmann's "Faerie," but not to the exclusion of one or the other. It is the blend of reality and fantasy that makes the role-play vital and significant and keeps the imagination going. A "scarlet-hued" room can be as wonderful as a meeting with a deity if the DM can make it so and the players respond. The elements of mystery, awe, terror, villainy and heroism are not plucked from some cartoon heaven but are facets of human existence. They can be used in a boring manner and not achieve the desired end, or they can be used with dash and excitement to round out the game world.

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UP ON A SOAP BOX

Be a creative game-player

by Kristan Wheaton

Dungeons & Dragons and *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* are two of the most exciting games on the market. Unlike "normal" games, *D&D* and *AD&D* provide opportunities for not only role-playing, but creative, original thought as well. If one considers all of the possible scenarios and character reactions, then the game itself becomes the basis for original and unique plans of action.

However, this aspect of the game is not always emphasized when one sits down to a session of *D&D* or *AD&D*. All too often, Dungeon Masters spend their time dictating to players and forcing them into situations which cause them to "strike first and ask questions later." Surely, this limits the game in an area that should be exploited to both the player's and the DM's advantage.

This article will attempt to describe some exciting, inventive and creative methods of handling various monsters. These ideas are not meant to be idealized into Napoleonic-like strategies. On the contrary, it is hoped that these methods will simply stimulate creative and unusual play in the reader's future sessions.

With all monsters, the first thing to consider, once battle is inevitable, is "How do I attack it?" Is the creature prone to spells? Does it have a low intelligence (confusion-type attacks work well here) or a high intelligence (insanity, paradoxes and the like are most effective under these circumstances)? What are its weaknesses and what are its strengths?

Basically, unless one can go in for a quick kill, then an attack on the monster's strongest *weapon* is in order. By all means, do not necessarily attack the monster's strongest *attribute*. This is foolish and could cost you the battle. Disarmament, however, usually leads to quick capitulation. Render useless a giant's arm so that he cannot heave boulders at you, or silence a harpy, and both become much more easily defeated. If you cannot destroy the weapon, then at least protect yourself from it. Use a mirror on a medusa or put wax in your ears to help against a banshee's scream.

Terrain can be the all-important factor in determining the outcome of battle. Remember that you are fighting in three dimensions, not just two. If possible, use your *Levitate* or *Fly* spells to advantage. A Magic-User in the air can see better and is also protected from hand-to-hand combat. Characters in danger of dying can be levitated out of melee. Always consider the third dimension (and possibly the fourth) as possible routes of escape or means to an advantage. Remember that *D&D* and *AD&D* are medieval-based games. Tactics that were feasible for that period in history are some of the best available when playing the game; i.e., armor tactics do not work unless you have tanks.

All creatures have a weakness. This is a key to remember in fighting a monster. Each monster, in its turn, must have an Achilles' heel or it would surely dominate the world of mortal men. For example, creatures with magic resistance seem very frustrating to the average player. However, it must be realized that magic resistance gives no benefit against physical forces. An earthquake is just as liable to swallow an orc as a demon. Creative thought along these lines leads to the concept of "indirect attack." Strike at those objects around you, in hopes that they will do damage for you. Use your lightning bolt to snap off a stalactite, or strike the ground to send a shower of rock chips toward the abdomen of whatever is attacking you. Knock down a tree; turn a ceiling to mud and let it collapse on the hapless attackers; these are the methods to deal with magic-resistant creatures, instead of striking at them and hoping the die roll will penetrate that magic resistance.

As a case study in "creative attack," consider dragons. For example, it is possible to generate a small boiler explosion in the stomach of a red dragon by forcing cold water down its throat. This is a simple, if not always a readily accessible, means of incapacitating the beast. However, what does one do if the brand of super-lizard one is facing does not happen to have a carmine tinge to its scales? The answer really depends on how deeply your DM has contemplated dragon physiology. A good guess, however, would be that a reasonable argument would prevail.

If we say, for example, that a blue dragon discharges a bolt of electricity, then we could assume that it must build up this highly positive charge within its mouth and then release it when its mouth is opened. If this is the case, then a large piece of metal within its mouth would serve to short-circuit the process. If it did not incapacitate the lizard, at least it would give it a splitting headache. One may not always have a large hunk of iron ore hanging around (or a man with sufficient strength to throw it), and so one must come up with an alternate means of gaining the advantage. One method of doing this is to simply take the high ground on the beast. If the beleaguered party can get above the head of the blue dragon, then the ground itself will act as a draw on the bolt of electricity. While you may not be able to convince your DM that this action will negate the effects of the breath weapon, it should be reasonable to assume a plus to the saving throw.

More about specific dragons later, but now, a few words about dragons in general. The dragon is a cowardly, solitary beast. If this were not so then they would most surely rule the world. This dictates repartee and palaver as the first line of defense (if the dragon can speak). While a dragon is not likely to be pleased at an intrusion into its privacy, it is also not likely to attack until it has determined the nature and strength of the party. Only the oldest and most confident of dragons should attack without thinking about it first. Remember, also, that it is hard to tell a first-level character from a tenth-level, if the first-level is a good enough actor. During this first, or "negotiation" phase, the player should attempt to gain whatever concessions that he or she can. Terrain advantages, as well as strategic placement of party members, should be accomplished in this first stage. Always

try to get above a dragon's head. Most things fall, including lightning (attracted by the ground), chlorine gas (it is heavier than air), acid (a little thing called gravity), and cold (cold air falls). Always spread out so that the breath weapon cannot demolish the entire party. Try to encircle the beast and get him before he can get you.

Despite all this, a major tactical advantage can be achieved by shutting down the breath weapon before it can be expelled. This is the most powerful of the dragon's weapons and should be the first thing to be dealt with. A large rock heaved in the general direction of the dragon's face should do the trick. If not that, then try a Web spell. Both of these would give some advantage to the party. If one can ruin the mouth, then one not only shuts down the breath weapon but can also put the second major weapon (disregarding spell-casting ability) out of commission, the bite. In other words, don't try to absorb the power of the breath weapon until the dragon runs out of charges; do something about it immediately; in the long run, you will be glad that you did.

Now, for some more dragons in specific. For a green dragon, a good plan is to acquire some sodium-tipped arrows. Store them in oil, since they will burn (slowly) in air. However, if one is shot into the mouth of a green dragon it will then react violently with the chlorine gas. This will surely leave the head of the dragon spinning for a few moments, and he should gag on all of the salt that you have just put in his throat.

Black dragons spit acid. Packets of lime (a strong alkaline) will at least neutralize the acid, if not get rid of the ability altogether. A gust of wind or a sudden downpour of created water would serve to disperse poisonous clouds (timing, of course, is very important here). This list is by no means exhaustive, and many more methods can be developed by the creative mind.

This article has expressed, through theory and case study, some of the principles of battle that are necessary for creative play of *D&D* and AD&D. As stated earlier, this article does not attempt to be the ultimate source of battle tactics, but is only provided as a guide towards better, more enjoyable, and more creative play.

Ways to handle high-level headaches

by Lewis Pulsipher

If you DM any fantasy role-playing game long enough, some characters are going to rise to such levels that the game (and you) can no longer adequately cope with them. In *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* this problem begins around twelfth level if not sooner. The characters are so powerful, not merely hard to kill but able to employ many means of escape or attack, that only extremely powerful monsters (or very large numbers) can threaten them during normal adventures.

Of course, it is possible to invent grossly powerful new monsters, or to introduce encounters with gods and demigods regularly, but this is only a minor palliative; and the frequent use of godlike beings is unbelievable, if not downright offensive, to those with a sense of game balance. Regardless of which route you take, you cannot get away from the fundamental problem: the players and their opponents have so many choices open to them that it becomes difficult for the DM to keep up with the game. There are just too many possibilities for the average DM to control. Often he doesn't recognize this, or can't do anything about it, with the result that the players easily defeat the monsters and the characters become even more powerful. Then we hear of twentieth- or even hundredth-level characters.

To put it another way, luck becomes a bigger factor in the game; when both sides can call upon great magical or other supernatural powers, the side which shoots first has a tremendous advantage. (I must admit, I often wonder how even very high-level characters stay alive in adventures against the super-monsters, who have the great advantage of defending; but in many campaigns they do.)

Let's assume you don't want to take the super-monster or demigod route, and you don't want to arbitrarily kill off the high levels, though some DMs have been known to do so. What is left to keep your campaign from being overrun by high-level characters? There are four alternatives which take the characters out of the adventuring part of the game, so that they won't rise yet further.

The first of these, and the hardest to institute, is voluntary retirement. Some DMs encourage players to retire high-level characters, to be used only for the rare Major Quest (such as a rescue mission to Hell). The character can sit in his castle, collect his taxes, possibly construct magic items or have others construct them for him, gather information, etc. Unfortunately, many players refuse to retire their characters, so some compulsion which is effective in game terms ("realistic") must be found.

This leads to the second alternative, sometimes called the "gunslinger effect." When characters begin to reach experience levels which are rare, whatever that level may be, then they become famous adventurers, men and women who live by violence and who may be expected to die violently — rather like the gunfighters of the Old West. Young swordsmen or magicians who want a quick reputation, who don't think "Conan" is as tough as people make him out to be, will come looking for a fight, just as kids with sixguns called out Billy the Kid or Wyatt Earp. And as in the Old West, the person looking for the reputation often won't be worried about the niceties of fair play; as long as he manages to kill his target, he'll get the reputation he desires.

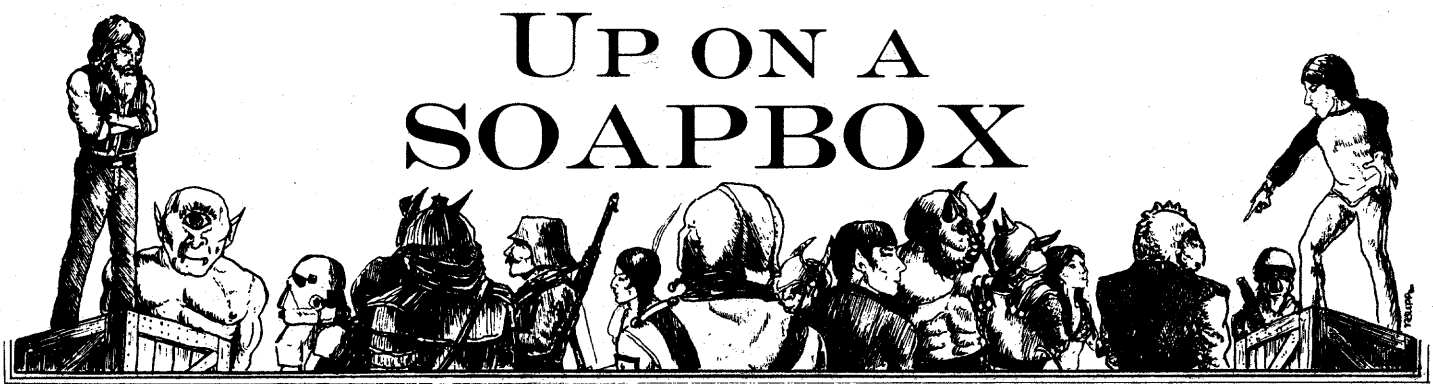
Whether this alternative will be feasible depends on the nature of your world. If wars are common, or if for other reasons individuals are more concerned about a group of enemies than about individual reputations, the "gunslinger effect" won't come into play much. If it does, however, players will voluntarily retire their characters in order to avoid a grave on Boot Hill, coming out of retirement only for vitally important (and secret) adventures.

The third (and best) road away from adventuring is politics. High-level characters can become involved in the larger issues of your world, wars, dynasties, colonization, court intrigue, and so on. They won't acquire much experience, for most of the time they'll be working through intermediaries. Their reward is political power, or additional wealth, not experience points. They are able to participate in this kind of activity because they are well-known (if not feared) people with a lot of money. Their actual powers and magic items, however, are largely neutralized because they must work behind the scenes. It is a new challenge for the players as well, so they're less likely to be unhappy that their strongest characters are no longer gaining levels. Of course, they'll want to start new characters to join in more typical adventures.

If none of these work for you, then in *AD&D*, at least, where eighteenth-level wizards can cast *Wish*, there is a final resort — the "wish wars." No one is going to rise to eighteenth level without making enemies. Even if one could, similarly high-level characters of opposing alignments aren't likely to ignore such a powerful person. What will happen? Will these supermen (and women) use wishes to destroy, or at least hinder, their adversaries? Perhaps more likely, they'll use wishes to attempt to undo enemy wishes. For example (roughly), "I wish to know of any wishes which have adversely affected me." (The exact wording would have to be more concise and less all-encompassing, of course.)

Mind-boggling, no? The gods themselves probably become involved. The twentieth-level characters are going to spend all their time just staying alive; yet in such a rarefied environment it would be a little unfair (not to say difficult) for the DM to decide who would live and who would die. It would be better to say that any character reaching such high levels gets so involved in the "wish wars," whether as wisher or as accessory, that he can no longer divert his attention to mere adventuring. And thus these overly high levels are taken out of the game.

I hope you never have to resort to the wish wars. But *AD&D* is a better game, and more believable, when the characters are not super-powerful and visitations of gods and demons are rare if not unknown. Somehow you have to neutralize the characters who, by hard work or good luck, have reached the rarefied heights of twelfth or fifteenth level.



When choosing a DM, be choosy!

by Fred Zimmerman

Someday you will face a change in your life so wrenching that oblivion seems almost preferable. Your DM will get tired, or you'll move, or he'll move—anyway, something will be different, and you'll need a new DM.

When you find a prospective new DM, arrange to play with him and see if anyone with whom you have played has played with this DM. Did you enjoy playing with these people? If not, remember to notice how the new DM handles the "problems" these people may cause for you.

Try to talk with the DM for at least a few minutes before you play. Ask him if and how he has modified the standard *AD&D™* rules. Does his magic system favor Magic-Users? Most do. Is his combat system vague? This often means he likes to fudge the results. You will probably like this the first few times you get lucky. Soon, though, you will realize that an unfair combat system makes victories less meaningful. Does this DM ever allow no-saving-throw deaths, other than those examples in the *AD&D* rules? This can lead to no-saving-throw violence between the players and the DM. Don't take your cherished character into a killer dungeon. Finally, remember that there is no virtue in unnecessary complication. Do his variants improve the flow of play? Be inquisitive now rather than enraged later. Find out as much as you can, but don't rush to judgment. Play with anyone once.

Assuming that you do play, you should consider a few administrative details. How long does it take for the players to assemble? Punctual, well-organized players make for a better campaign. Is the DM ready to run? He should be immediately ready to transact minor business with characters. He should be ready to run a major expedition with no more than a half-hour of on-the-spot preparation. Are you comfortable? Is this a convenient time for you to play? These questions will take on more importance as the campaign continues. Think about them now.

If you are bringing an old character to this new world, does the DM examine it carefully? As a player, you may not like this, but a superior DM will be skeptical and exacting. The best DM with whom I have played will allow *no* imported characters. Every character in his campaign was generated in his world. As a result, his players have a visceral involvement with the campaign. I personally follow two rules. One, I allow *no* transplanted characters to bring their magic items. Two, I allow *no* transplanted characters of higher level than the lowest-level "native" member of a party. This ensures that the players field a balanced and integrated party composed of trustworthy old comrades. Assembling a group of suspicious strangers—and if they aren't suspicious, they should be!—creates pointless and distracting diversions from the main business of the expedition.

Does your new DM have a variant procedure for character generation? This is a common time-waster. I once played with a DM using a system in which it took 2 hours to set up a six-member party. That is inexcusable. Furthermore, it is my experience that variant ability scores are most often used as constraints on the players' actions. One DM made us roll for superego. Then, whenever I wanted to do anything morally questionable, I had to make a saving throw vs. superego. I object vehemently to psychological constraints on players. Fantasy role-playing is not a psychoanalytic simulation. It is a game, and the players must be free to play their roles.

How plausible is your new DM's rationale for your entry into his/her campaign? Your character should be inserted into the campaign milieu in a logical way. If there is an influx of adventurers into an area, the campaign environment should reflect the consequences of this influx. Prices should inflate, goods become scarce, and merchants prosper.

Good DMs will have well balanced campaigns. They will not make it easy for 1st-level player characters to join up with high-level characters. That is a sure ticket to Monty Haul Dungeon. What is the range of player-character experience levels in the campaign? Something is liable to be wrong if there are any characters of 9th level or higher. The best campaign in which I have played has only one character as high as 4th level. L'lan the Betrayer reached that exalted peak only after a year of weekly play and several escapes from nearly certain death. But the other extreme is just as bad: there should not be an endless succession of 1st-level characters killed time and again. Low-level characters with continuity yield the most balanced and exciting play.

How rigorously does the DM make the players provide for the equipment of the party? This is difficult to evaluate. While specificity simplifies play later on, it slows things down at the start. One good compromise is to provide an "Adventurer's Package" at the local General Store. A standard list of equipment can be made available at a discount if purchased as a package. Disputes over equipment will inevitably arise during the expedition. How does the DM handle these arguments? If he can persuade the players that no, they would not "of course" have packed a pressure suit, he is doing his job. If he can do so amicably, he is doing his job well.

You should observe the behavior of the other players while setting up, especially those who frequently play with this DM. Are they talking excitedly about previous expeditions? Do they feel that they are strands in a rich tapestry of events? Do they have ideas for the expedition? Do they have standard operational procedures? Do they make decisions quickly and without ill-will? If the answer to these questions is "yes," the DM has been doing a good job of maintaining player interest.

Now the party is equipped and ready to

go. What are you going to do? Once the purpose of the expedition has been defined, you have some significant new data to use in assessing the DM. First, did the DM lead you by the nose? Is he obviously directing the party? The superior DM will manipulate players in more subtle ways. (To paraphrase Heisenberg: *all* DMs manipulate players.) Is the purpose of the expedition clear? Well-defined missions increase the probability that your character will survive. Almost as importantly, if you are a peaceful soul like I am, clear plans for an expedition drastically reduce the opportunities for long, irritating arguments about what to do next.

There are several criteria of the superior DM which you can test during play itself. Are the mechanics of movement smooth? You may be lost and confused, but you should always have an idea of the terrain you're on at the moment. Does the DM make players follow through on decisions which they have called out to him? Failing to do so is a common weakness of soft-hearted DMs. Players should think carefully about the consequences of their words and deeds. DMs should be consistent in their interpretation of the rules. A moment of leniency one night followed by strict constructionism the next will lead to charges of unfairness. Does the DM allow players to improvise? Narrow-mindedness about physical possibilities is an easy way to stereotype play. In role-playing games, the imagination must be free. If your DM thinks it would be difficult to do something, he should point out concrete dangers and obstacles, not simply forbid the action. Otherwise, encounters will become routine, the players unenthusiastic, the DM bored.

Probably the most important function of the DM is description. He should be coherent, thorough, and imaginative. Form should follow function. The DM must create a plausible environment for the players to inhabit. He should not gloss over background information such as the details of furniture, lighting, and atmosphere. In the real world, one is instantly aware of these things. The DM should not force the players to ask such obvious questions. But he should force the players to be specific when they are fishing for answers which require some intelligence to deduce or infer. No shortchanges and no free rides! Finally, the DM must provide the color and flavor which make adventuring such a delight. Anyone who has ever played with a pre-packaged module or a computer dungeon knows how drab the descriptions can sometimes be. The good DM has an eye for the telling detail and the synthesizing perspective. The better the DM, the more real and meaningful his world will seem.

Superior DMs will also run encounters smoothly. Otherwise, the challenges posed will be robbed of their urgency. Does the DM resolve combat without tedious die-rolling and consultation of tables? A superior DM will be completely conversant with the combat rules. Does the DM ensure that each player can and does act independently during resolution of encounters? It is essential that each member of the party feels that he has had a hand in the action.

How does the DM handle NPCs? The superior DM loves to play NPCs to the hilt. They should be every bit as curious, suspicious, sensitive, greedy, obnoxious, and aggressive as the player characters. Each individual NPC should have a personality of his own. The NPCs should fit into the campaign background. If there are very high-level NPCs in the area, there should be a good reason why they haven't cleaned out the dungeon. The powerful NPCs should have economic and political clout. The NPCs should have relationships with each other, not just with the player characters. After every expedition, the DM should think about what the "idle" NPCs did in the meantime. Then, when he brings the players up to date, he can give them the feeling that they are involved in a complex society. The DM should above all resist the tendency to use NPCs as crutches for weak character parties. He must remember: the players must take risks to develop self-reliance.

After you have had an encounter or two, you will know if you are in a killer dungeon. Inferior DMs try to create exciting situations by proliferating rare, unlikely monsters. A good DM will use simple monsters to set up complex problems. Does your new DM use hybrids or weird beasties: e.g. blink dragons, uranium golems, exploding orcs, sword swallowers? Beware of the DM who kills your whole party just so you can praise his oh-so-ingenious monster or laugh at his simpleminded puns. Killer DMs don't usually have the guts to let the party get the treasure even after it has beaten the invincible monsters. All too often, there will be a series of tough wandering monsters, accompanied by chuckles from the DM.

At the close of the session of play, think about how the DM awards experience points. Make sure you aren't playing with a Monty Haul DM. Only extraordinary expeditions should give you any chance at all of going up a whole level. Most expeditions should advance you no farther than 10% of the way towards the next level. Ask the DM what bonuses he gave the players for cleverness, resourcefulness, and ingenuity. Only inferior DMs stick to the book and award experience points strictly for killing monsters and getting gold. I am less bloodthirsty than most DMs, so I will award points to players for talking or thinking their ways out of dangerous situations. Incidentally, I never award points to characters— excepting Assassins—who kill creatures already knocked out or helpless. I give points to reflect the skill gained by defeating the monster. A body count is not a measure of heroism.

You should be sure to see that there is some sign that the DM has given thought to the experience point system. He should not award full points to high-level characters who defeat low-level monsters. He should reward innovation and improvisation. I justify this by citing the Law of Diminishing Returns. After you've opened the door, killed the monsters, and glommed the treasure for the nth time, you aren't adding much to your combat experience. To reach higher levels, you must develop new skills and seek out new challenges to meet. These new challenges you may face after changing DMs are one sound reason to experiment with several DMs.

If you follow the checklist sketched above, you will be able to assess the technical competence of the Dungeon Master. Often players avoid new DMs not because they are incompetent but because they do not want to play with strangers. As long as you don't hate someone, you should be able to play with him. My advice to the player seeking the ideal DM is this: ignore any fastidious twinges you may have. Sanity is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being a good DM or player. In a good campaign, player personalities will be obscured by character personalities anyway. Give the people in your new campaign a chance; give yourself a chance.

What is gaming's role in life?

by Karl Horak

The recent interest in the relationship between morality and fantasy role-playing games ("Painted Ladies and Potted Monks," *Dragon* #36; "The Problem of Morality in Fantasy," *Dragon #39)* seems at once both amusingly trivial and fundamentally important: trivial because of the great effect on our lives attributed to *Dungeons & Dragons®,* a "mere" game; important because the question of good vs. evil is one of the most profound and ancient queries of mankind. Let me review what I see as the important points raised by the two previous authors, Larry DiTillio and Douglas Bachmann, before continuing with some observations on how others have perceived the role of morality in gaming.

DiTillio has advocated using fantasy/role-playing as a moral teaching tool in which attitudes toward real life are formed. Bachmann, on the other hand, lamented DiTillio's "relativistic morality" and the game's lack of mechanics and objectives that deal with ethics and morality. Bachmann based his points on an inherent "morality of being" derived from a general pattern of heroic fantasy in literature.

DiTillio and Bachmann are not alone in

their interest in morality in gaming and its effects on everyday life. Most readers will remember an incident 1½ years ago, avidly reported by the press, in which a college student who actively played *D&D®* disappeared for a number of days. Presumably, so the stories read, the fantasies of the game became part of his real life and he descended into the sewers to act them out.

The actual circumstances turned out to be far more mundane than suggested by the stories. Nevertheless, national news services were eager to lend credence to rumors purporting a replacement of "normal" behavior by deviant behavior fostered by fantasy role-playing games.

A less sensational interest in game morality and its everyday effects was noted by Emanuel Lasker, a renowned chess master of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He asks rhetorically in his *Manual of Chess, "How should our poor little game, even in smallest detail, bear comparison to infinite Life?"*

Of course, he referred to the game of chess, but his remarks have a more general application and validity. He continues, *"What is true of Chess must hold by analogy for other games. And games being, at least in* intent, *modelled on Life—simplified, to be sure, but resembling it in essentials—there must be some analogy between them."*

Lasker then brings forward the basic principle of the theory of chess promulgated by another master, Wilhelm Steinitz: *"The basis of a masterly plan is always a valuation."* A judgment of quality, that is, of good or bad, is the prerequisite of masterful play.

Furthermore, *"'Aesthetic valuations evoked in Chess are likely to be met in other fields of endeavor. To what category must* we assign *Chess* [and *D&D,* I maintain] *so as to account for its aesthetic effect? Manifestly, the class of achievements."* That is, it is action that defines the quality of a valuation.

The need for game-design features that simulate a growth in dignity and nobility so as to promote ethical decision-making and a heroic transformation is not apparent. *D&D,* like chess, requires value judgements for best play and the effects of these judgements become apparent as achievements during the game.

"Relative morality" is important and valid only insofar as it affects the DM's opinion of the standard alignment classification. It is the DM's prerogative to structure the morality of his world as he sees fit.

The Paladin of DiTillio's account could have come from a world where gratuitous sex is considered good—but without certain social rituals it would be quite illegal. In such a world the Paladin would jeopardize his alignment with respect to Law, not Good. The effective result is the same in either case: he loses Paladin status. How one plays the game (the aesthetic quality of one's character achievements) can demonstrate more moral principle than any superficial morality of game design.

Another author who can be consulted in this matter is Jorge L. Borges. In his works compiled in *Labyrinths* is the short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." It concerns an ingenious fantasy world constructed by a secret society of learned men over a period of centuries.

Of the philosophers of Tlön, Borges says, *"They seek neither truth nor likelihood; they seek astonishment. They think metaphysics is a branch of literature of fantasy."* This statement, I believe, describes the position of a majority of DMs.

Borges has a tendency *"to esteem religious and philosophical ideas for their aesthetic value, and even for what is magical or marvelous in their content."* André Maurois writes of him, *"Nothing pleases Borges better than to play in this way with mind, dreams, space, and time. The more complicated the game becomes, the happier he is."*

Borges' statement, *"The mind was dreaming; the world was its dream,"* neatly summarizes the efforts of DMs everywhere. There is no "morality of being" here, nor a "relativistic morality." All Borges emphasizes is, *"If this . . . were developed, . . . what world would be created?"* It need not teach or moralize, but rather it should stimulate thought and entertain.

Presumably (and I may be much in error), DiTillio's "relativistic morality" and Bachmann's "morality of being" are based on a Judeo-Christian dichotomy of Good and Evil. In a game with admittedly simplistic alignment definitions, it is an easy matter to pose moral questions with well-defined answers. But in "real life" or a complex, artfully done campaign, as Borges says, *"The facts of one's nature are discovered to be astoundingly complex and slippery, evil masquerading with endless subtlety as good, and construing the good as evil. And in this perplexity it still matters absolutely that one choose the good."*

Alan Watts, a prolific writer in comparative religion and Zen Buddhism, mentions another disturbing point: *"Man is a self-conscious and therefore self-controlling organism, but how is he to control that aspect of himself which does the controlling* ?" In *D&D,* yet another level is present: The character is controlled by the player, but what controls the player? The illusion of a little man inside, that I am another character controlled by a higher-order player or DM who makes the ultimate moral decisions, is an infinite regression, like mirrors reflecting each other endlessly. Does the little man within have a miniscule man in turn inside his head?

The experience of relationship between good and evil comes about from the insight that there is no controller. *"This becomes evident,"* said Watts, *"as soon as the consciousness which has felt itself to be the inner controller starts to examine itself, and finds out that it does not give itself the power of control."* He concludes one essay saying, *"On all sides, within and without, he sees all beings, all things, all events only as the playing of the Self in its myriad forms."*

It is not necessary for the reader at this point to despair of good and evil, leave home, and study with a Zen master for five years. Gensha the Zen master wrote:

If you understand, things are as they are;

If you do not understand, things are as they are.

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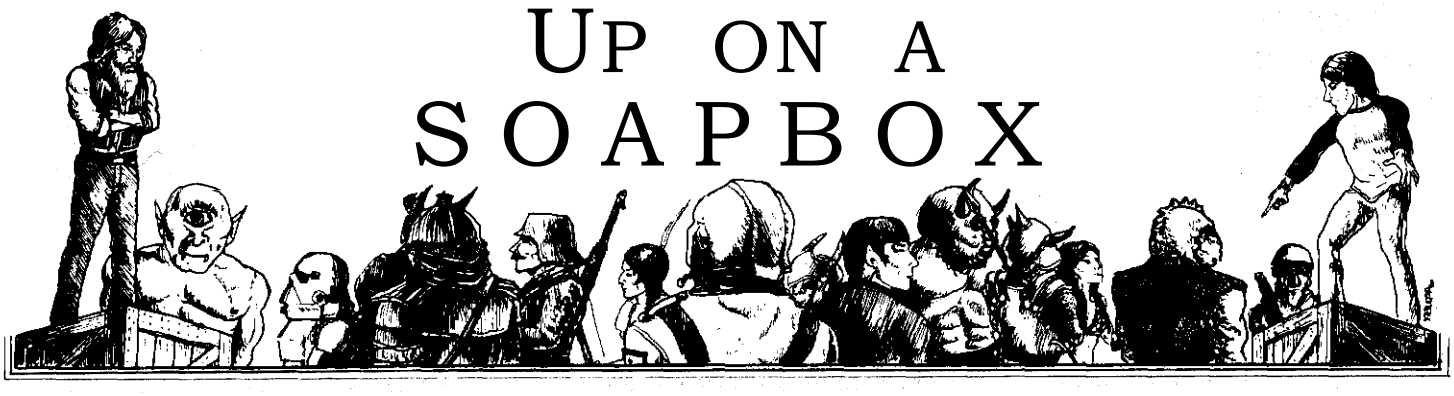


Players don't need to know all the rules

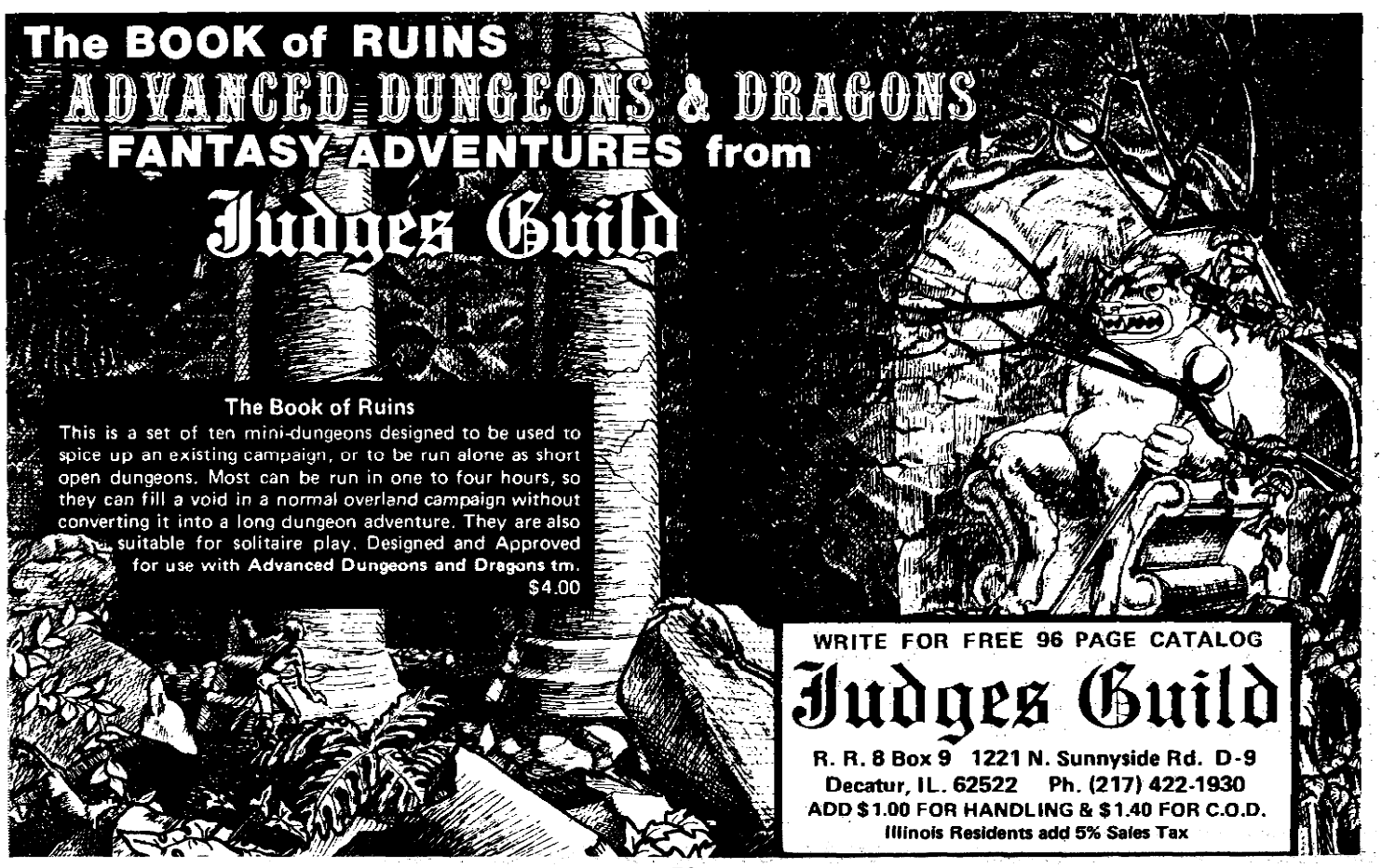
by Ed Greenwood

Anyone who has undertaken the task of introducing non-gamers to the AD&D™ or D&D® games (in a high school or community program, for example) has endured the "fun" of explaining totally foreign concepts (saving throw, alignment, armor class, levels — four kinds!, ongoing adventure vs. "the object of the game is to win by...") to completely mystified beginners. Conversely, almost everyone who now plays either game has fond memories of those earliest, most exciting adventures where you didn't really understand what was going on, but it was fascinating...

So why not leave the players in the dark? (I'm assuming here that the reader is a thoughtful, prepared, infallible, impassionately fair DM — as, of course, all Dungeon Masters are.) Why clutter play with the game mechanics, when the play's the thing? This approach frees much more time for actual play, and avoids a lot of needless confusion. As a first-aid instructor of mine once said, "A kiss is the best greeting: KISS — Keep It Simple, Stupid."

The question arises: How can one play a game without knowing the rules? The answer, as D&D players know, is role-play. As a player, state what you (the character) are trying to do, and the referee (who knows the rules) will tell you what is actually happening. This approach, used by a careful referee, works admirably. It is by no means a new idea.

In 1876, Colonel von Verdy du Vernois, a prominent German military instructor, advocated the simplification of existing wargames used in training German officers. This simplification consisted, in general terms, of removing dice and most of the rules from the game and replacing them with an umpire (a battle-



The players must learn the truth themselves and think 'on their feet' while they fight, as true adventurers must to survive and achieve success.

experienced officer). As Stephen B. Patrick puts it in The History of Wargaming *(Wargame Design,* New York, Simulations Publications Incorporated, 1977). p. 4: "In effect, then, the umpire would make up the rules and apply them as he went along, and the players would have the freedom to attempt things that might of might not be allowed by the umpire... the players were separated and given only the information they could legitimately possess." This game was termed "free" Kriegspiel (German for "war game"), in contrast to the traditional "hard rules" wargame ("rigid" Kriegspiel). Criticism of arbitrariness and problems of complexity resulted in an eventual combination of the two types of games, in which the referee used charts and tables as an aid in play. This was dubbed "semi-free" Kriegspiel.

"Free" Kriegspiel sounds something like the D&D game, and "semi-free" Kriegspiel sounds somewhat similar to the AD&D game, but the approach is different. If we apply this approach to those games, play is as follows:

Players know only that information which is possessed by their character as a result of upbringing, observation of surroundings, and adventuring. The DM provides this, initially in the form of a booklet or sheaf of written information — information carefully tailored to reflect each character's background and native intelligence and wisdom. Such information, as in "real life," is often incorrect, oversimplified, or biased. Experience then takes on a real meaning for the player character, as acquired knowledge (hopefully) leads to better performance.

Players know their characters' abilities only approximately ("Well," saith the DM, "you're fairly good-looking, if not sexy... you inspire confidence, people look to you..."), and this includes hit points ("You bleed easily") and damage taken in combat ("You're pretty badly hurt... it's painful — you feet weak and sick, and it'll hamper your fighting"). Players know nothing of charts and tables, and have (at first) only a vague idea of the effectiveness of one weapon over another in a given situation. Battling monsters truly becomes a dangerous business when their characteristics are unknown and it is a trial-and-error affair ("You can't seem to hit this thing with your blades ... it's turning towards you..."). This is not to say that every monster will be an unknown horror whose weakness the party must find immediately, or perish. Many monsters (e.g. the goblin races) will be familiar, and even more reclusive races such as dwarves, gnomes, and sprites will be readily recognizable to human characters who have never seen such creatures before, through legends and "fairy tales."

Much of this latter sort of information is of course incorrect; there are often many wild and contradictory tales and beliefs concerning such legendary creatures (two "real life" examples: the vampire and the dragon). The players must learn the truth themselves, listening attentively as the DM graphically describes combat effects and think "on their feet" while they fight, as true adventurers must to survive and achieve success.

Since each player has only one character, he or she knows nothing of the background of other characters except from observation and as they trade (or volunteer) information, and knows initially nothing of the specialized abilities of other character classes. (This may lead to, for example, a quite proper fear and distrust of magic on the part of fighters!)

Inevitably players will learn something of the rules as play progresses (for instance, the number of times the DM tells a player his or her character must seek out a new tutor to further advance the character's skills will tell the player the level of the character), and this information should by no means be jealously guarded. Perhaps players could be individually introduced to the mechanics of the game one concept at a time, each time their characters achieve a higher experience level. This gradual process, by the way, should produce some good DMs — players who have been through it all "rising from the ranks" and know what to avoid as a referee.

There are drawbacks to this system. DMs must do a *lot* of preparation; all the individual character information must be written out in advance. Players are deprived of some of the fun of planning which a full knowledge of character abilities, weapon damage, and so on would allow them, and some of the fun of rolling dice to hit a monster ... but the advantages of such a system (for novices, at least) outweigh the disadvantages.

These advantages are as follows: Magic retains its mystery. None of this "A +1 sword? (yawn) Put it in the bag, Fredolf." Or worse, the lost uncertainty of: "A censer, eh? Well, it either controls air elementals or summons hostile ones, and either way, it's worth 25,000 gp to us... let Hopeless the Henchman there have it. Either his experience'll go up 4,000, or he'll be killed, in which case that's one less way we have to split the treasure." This problem of players who know too much ruins the fun of play like nothing else can, and extends even to "ignorant barbarians" (as characters) who can quote chapter and verse from the Monster Manual (or worse, the Dungeon Masters Guide!). It is more than a "realism" problem; it is a problem of game balance. These "expert" players not only gain an unfair advantage over monsters as well as less experienced players, but also yawn their way through encounters that should be mysterious, and therefore both dangerous and exciting.

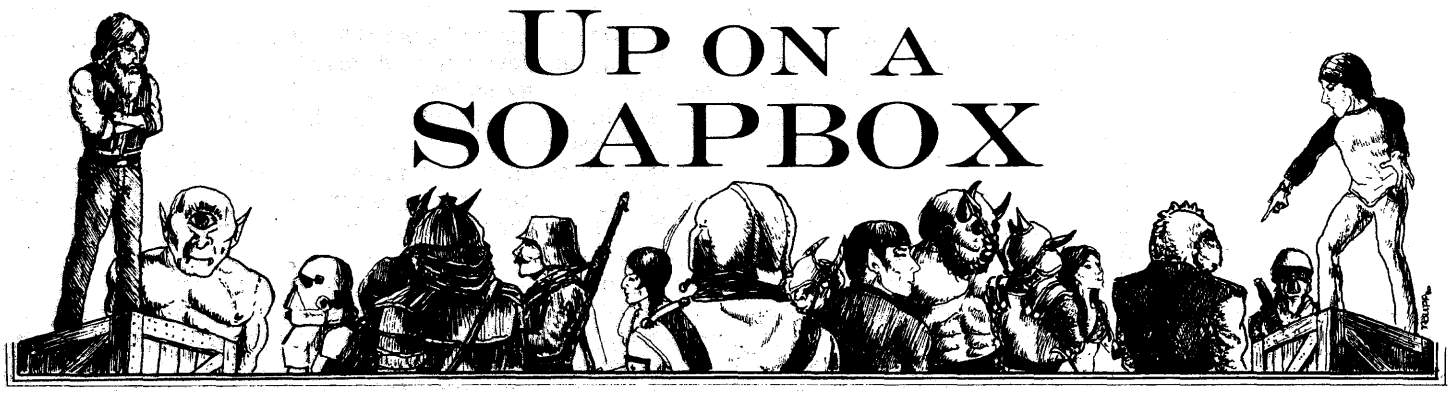
The DM's usual solution to the monster (and magic item) "blahs" is to invent new ones. Good new ideas, however, don't grow on trees, and the best sources (such as this magazine) are often perused by the players also.

Players with Magic-user characters can keep actual spell books, writing down whatever information the DM gives them (obtained as a result of their discoveries or research). Mages can actually trade information to get more. Fittingly, much of their time and effort will actually be spent in research, locating reliable sources of magical information, piecing together clues, and experimenting. They will know many spells only through legends or by seeing the effects, and can choose to follow up on those in which they are interested. The DM can give them a spell right out of the Players Handbook, twist it a bit for campaign purposes, or delete it altogether without anyone feeling cheated.

As a hidden advantage, the heavy preparatory workload for the DM will tend to lead to starting scenarios resembling. this: "Characters are youngest sons of local smith, farmer, lord, priest, etc. in a small rural valley, who are setting forth to make their fortune." This keeps things at the outset on a scale that everyone can handle. It provides the characters with relevant secondary skills, and allows the DM to let them get their feet wet with relatively weak opponents — local bandits and the like. TSR Hobbies, Inc., has prepared an excellent "rural village" module, T1, *The Village of Hommlet.* This is an admirable model for the DM.

This approach is advanced for DMs starting new campaigns, and for argument's sake. Doubtless it will be of use in the latter manner; hopefully it will be as useful in the former.

Battling monsters truly becomes a dangerous business when their characteristics are unknown and it is a trial-and-error affair.



GOOD DM CAN CURE BAD BEHAVIOR

by Thomas Griffith

A vicious battle is raging. Cries of anguish reverberate off the plaster walls of the large room. Hatred gleams in the warriors' eyes as they try not just to vanquish but also to humiliate their opponents. The non-combatants suffer too. Shattered by the turmoil, they will go sadly home, their hopes shattered.

Is this an epic battle between Law and Chaos? Not quite. It's the result of a spoiled D&D® game — and the damage inflicted is to the friendships between the players.

Because a DUNGEON & DRAGONS® game is open-ended, controlling the actions of players presents problems not encountered in most other games. A lack of fixed rules often leads to arguments, especially with the Dungeon Master but also between players themselves. Without individual "turns," one player can dominate play while others get bored. Overindulgence in food, and especially drink, can lead to sloppy play and rowdy behavior. Players can become so attached to their characters that they become angry or upset when the character's life is threatened. In the interest of helping to solve these and other problems, the following suggestions are offered to make D&D games run more smoothly and be enjoyable for all involved.

(1) The Dungeon Master should neither argue with the players nor change his decisions. Like a baseball umpire, the DM must make a lot of close calls and, inevitably, he will miss a few. If he changes his judgements in reaction to player objections, he will only encourage more complaints. Even just arguing with a player, without necessarily giving in, spreads the idea among players that making judgements is not the exclusive domain of the referee. This can only lead to further conflicts of the same nature.

In discretionary situations, then, the best policy is "Never change, never argue." After the evening's play is over the DM can discuss the situation with the players and, perhaps, even admit to a mistake. In non-discretionary matters like determining the range of a spell, however, the referee might change his decision, and rightly so, if a timely objection is made.

(2) The Dungeon Master should write the scenario in advance and should not make it easier or harder as he goes along, according to how the player characters are faring. By writing out the foundation of the adventure beforehand, the DM both speeds play and reduces his need for on-the-spot decisions. Players never like having their characters killed, but they will accept it more readily if they know that the referee is not out to get them. By the same token, players feel a greater sense of accomplishment if they succeed without the help of an apparently soft-hearted DM.

(3) In most groups of players there should be a caller in non-melee situations. In addition to providing the referee with clear instructions, a good caller can also organize the players in the party. The caller should be firm, but without dictating to the party. He should be chosen by his personal characteristics, not by those of his character. After all, a player with a "real" charismas of 3 can be a paladin.

(4) During melee there should be no caller; each person should run his or her own character. This system has several advantages over the "organized" way in which non-melee situations are played. It gives each player an opportunity to participate. It allows players to work at cross purposes. It encourages bravery, since often only the more brave adventurers can act quickly and decisively enough. The fearless warrior decides, without any consultation necessary, what he will do based on what he observes.

Since it is more exciting to actively participate in making decisions — by making them yourself *for* yourself—this everyone-for-himself approach encourages risk-taking. In games run by the author, players are not allowed to give advice to other players unless their characters are proximate to each other. Even then, only a sentence or two of advice is allowed to be exchanged per round. If players persist in voicing and receiving more advice anyway, the DM can justifiably rule that the conversation took so long that the offending player's character was unable to load his bow or execute a spell. When the "talkers" were cured, the result was melees with full participation by all players, without being disorderly.

(5) Playing sessions should end at a reasonable hour. Overtired gamers play poorly and anger easily. Since a good D&D session can take a long time, the activity should start early in the day or evening. Players without characters should arrive before the others or should be provided with pre-rolled, pre-equipped characters. Once it is under way, the referee should make the adventure move along quickly. Charts should be organized for rapid referral, Players should be required to inform the DM of any special abilities their characters have which might modify the standard charts. Overfrequent listening and trap-checking should be discouraged, perhaps by a few wandering monsters. "Real-time" limits might be placed on the duration of certain spells and potions. Finally, natural breaks should be designed in the adventure where play can easily be suspended for the time being.

(6) Distractions should be reduced. While one of the attractions of fantasy role-playing is that it allows much more interaction than traditional games like bridge or chess, the interaction should be within the game context. Talk about

(Turn to page 55)

SOAPBOX

(From page 52)

upcoming baseball games or the quality of the food being served should be kept to a minimum. Likewise, a non-stop series of "orc jokes" can detract from the game.

Such extraneous conversations indicate that the adventure itself is not keeping the players' attention, The problem could be that the scenario is uninteresting, but another quite possible cause is a distracting physical environment. A game should not take place in a junk-filled room with players sprawled in easy chairs eating pretzels while the Dungeon Master searches for a ghoul that fell in the onion dip. The players should all sit around a table that contains game materials and little else. Refreshments should be on side tables if possible. The set-up should allow all gamers to see the map of the adventure and to reach and move miniature figures.

(7) Individual "problem" players can be disciplined within the context of the game. Loud and constant talkers might attract more than the usual number of wandering monsters. Inattentive players will miss subtle clues about the nature of an unusual artifact, and may be more easily surprised by monsters. Cowardly characters might be denied a full share of experience points. Lawful good clerics who never endanger themselves to aid others might find their god is angry.

If the success of the party in the adventure is endangered by an offending player, pressure is exerted on him by the other players to mend his ways — not only for the sake of the playing session, but for the sake of their characters.

(8) Use miniatures or other tokens in a clear, three-dimensional display to represent characters and monsters and their locations. Miniatures largely end arguments over such matters as the relative locations of each character or the availability of a line of sight. Marching orders and door-opening procedures are easily visualized and can be easily changed. Rooms, halls, and doors can be marked on the playing surface. Hand-painted lead figures are best aesthetically, but virtually any sorts of identifiable markers can and should be used,

(9) finally and most importantly, a Dungeon Master can best avoid the problems of unwanted behavior by players by being a dedicated DM. An exciting, challenging scenario with well prepared moderation is the best safeguard of all. The players will be having too much fun to argue.

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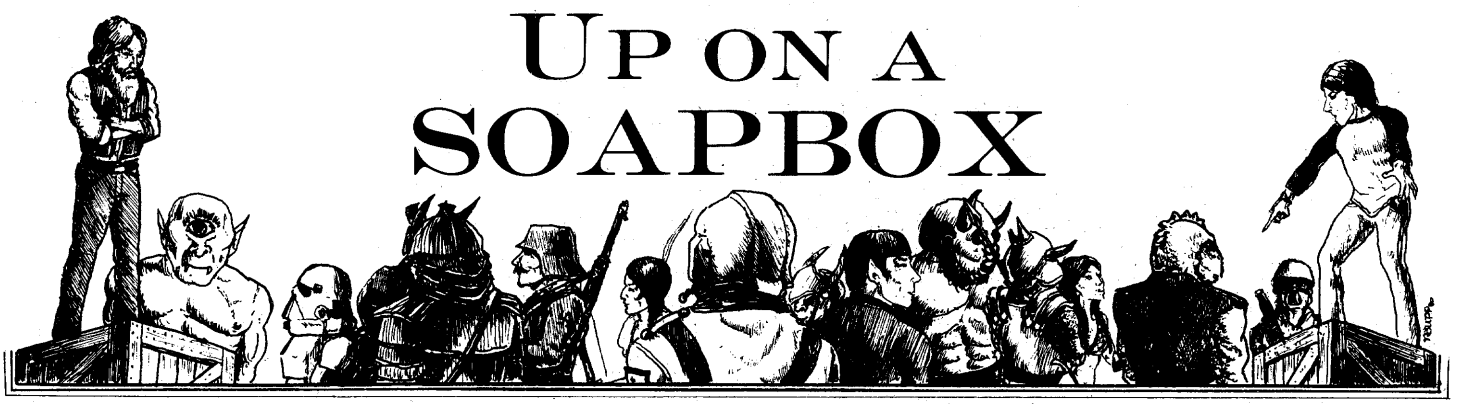


To err is human, to repair divine

by Lewis Pulsipher

Almost any inexperienced DM sooner or later makes a big mistake. He lets a player character acquire a magic item or gain an ability which is simply too powerful, which enables that character to dominate the game so that other characters become onlookers instead of participants. A newly devised character class could result in a similar situation.

Everybody makes mistakes. But when it comes to fixing them, many inexperienced DMs have trouble finding the right approach. How can a mistake like this be rectified?

The first possibility is to ignore the problem and hope it will go away. But usually by the time the DM realizes his error, it will be evident that the problem isn't going to fix itself.

Second (the alternative that inexperienced DMs usually choose), the DM can start a vendetta against the character, throwing obstacles in the character's path until he kills him or steals his magic. I've often heard of this happening. I wonder how any character can survive for long against a determined DM, but apparently some do. Michael Stackpole's article "The Bigger They Are the Harder They Fall" *(Sorcerer's Apprentice* #8) describes how to eliminate an overpowerful character — if it is simply your intention to deliberately slaughter the victim. Let's assume, however, that the DM already knows how to kill someone, or how to neutralize his magic, in a short time.

This "vendetta method" is cruel treatment for characters when the means of revenge has no meaning in the context of the game. It is easy to concoct a pursuit or a conflict which arises naturally from the game, and not directly from the DM's realization of error.

For example, if a character obtains a powerful item, the former owner may try to get it back. He could hire magic-users or others to find out who has it, if he doesn't already know; he can contract an assassin, or hire a magic-user to send an invisible stalker, or make a pact with a demon, or even use a *Wish* to regain his item. These are all natural parts of a fantasy world, and are not vendettas. It's the DM who manufactures a vendetta when no need for one exists who is using alternative two.

Any outright attempt at retribution or revenge, even of a non-vendetta nature, should be a last resort, not a first reaction. Such action can make the involved player, or all the players, feel that the DM is unfair. The DM could find his friendships with the player(s), outside the game, suffering severely. It can led to feuds at times when another person serves as DM for the group, and the ex-DM's characters can be ganged up on. It can even lead to a vendetta just like the one that started the whole dispute.

There are two better methods of fixing a DMing mistake. The first one is to try to reason with the player involved. Show him how the ability or item he gained is harming the campaign, however much fun he may have lording it over everyone and showing off. Convince him that the game will be more fun for all, even himself, if he voluntarily gives up the cause of the disruption, possibly accepting some material compensation. Perhaps he'll give his magic item to the church in return for future favors, or to the state in return for a noble title. He might accept some non-reusable items for one indefinitely usable item. The trade can be arranged in such a way as to reflect well on the character and offer him possibilities of gain, even in a campaign where all other player characters have also become more powerful.

The other method is to persuade the player to retire his character either temporarily, until the other characters reach a similar level of power, or permanently, if the imbalance is really great. The player can enjoy the ego boost of possessing a powerful and well-known character, yet he will henceforth use another character on adventures. The imbalancing factor will be out of the game, though it will still be in the background of the campaign.

By either of these solutions, the DM can avoid incurring the enmity of the player and avoid unfairly picking on one person, but still eliminate the disruption from the game. It is always better to resort to reason than to force; if all else fails, because of a player's refusals of less extreme solutions, a DM can still resort to the vendetta, if he thinks it's fair. Nothing is lost by trying other methods first.

Example: Let's say a character has been allowed to find a fully charged *lightning bolt wand.* Thereafter he starts blasting every enemy in sight while other characters look on and the DM grits his teeth. If he is a 10th-level character in a high-powered game, the wand won't disrupt the game much, but if he and his friends are fifth level something has to be done. Those 100 charges could last a long time. Perhaps you could offer (via a non-player character, with the gods mediating) to trade a special *ring of regeneration* which would work only for the character (fusing onto his finger) in exchange for the wand. Or you might offer a *Wish* (plus some interesting scrolls?). Think of some item or items which, while valuable to the player, will not disrupt the campaign the way the wand would. In general, the offered exchange should be defensive rather than offensive magic, or perhaps information-gathering magic instead of either of the other types, because offensive magic tends to help everyone in a character's party while the other types, if carefully selected, will help only the character to whom they are traded.

The DM who makes up for his mistakes in a manner such as this, given a proper and reasonable amount of agreement and cooperation by players, stands a far smaller chance of being looked upon as unfair or arbitrary — and his campaign stands a far greater chance of surviving.

The best DMs will look further than the book

by Tom Armstrong

The attitudes of different Dungeon Masters towards the use of the available books of rules for the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game are myriad. I have played in many campaigns at various times and have heard and seen all kinds of rulings.

One DM of my acquaintance permitted his players to read any and all of the manuals during play. This naturally led to the players looking up the various monsters as they encountered them. At the other extreme, I had one DM ask me not to look at the Players Handbook during his game. (Since I prefer to play magic-users, this definitely put a crimp in my style!) I've also seen just about everything in between.

In my own campaign, the players are permitted only the Players Handbook, while I alone use the Monster Manual and the Dungeon Masters Guide. This makes the game fairer in the sense that, if the players are able to look up the monsters, there is no challenge to dig for knowledge, or to try different things until the proper method is discovered. By the same token, permitting them to read the DMG means that they become totally self-sufficient, needing no outside help, and therefore producing no interaction with the non-player characters in the various towns and cities.

When the DMG came out, all the DMs I know were overjoyed! (I bought one of the first copies available in Colorado Springs.) The final answer to most of our problems had arrived! Imagine my complete happiness to find, not only those answers, but also new magical items — even a couple of monsters that my group was not familiar with!

Unfortunately, some of the players also bought the DMG, reviving the same problem I had before. Something had to be done! It had gotten to the point where, no matter what they encountered, they had all the answers. All the magical items were totally familiar to them — even though I had never included some of them in my treasures.

Well, I decided to change a few items here and there. I do this on occasion anyhow, and, if things were going to improve, it was darn near mandatory now! Any DM worth the name can't help but alter things just a little. It's a trademark of his/her game to have certain things that are different than all the others.

Monsters, of course, are an obvious place to twist things a bit. My players have stumbled across such things as kobolds with 18/00 strength, a rock troll (made of real rock), and lawful good goblins — all designed to shake up the average player's complacency. A few of my players were definitely upset after that single kobold wreaked all sorts of havoc by tearing into the group with a two-handed sword. And all of the players were a lot more cautious and a lot less sure of themselves — as it should be! —for a while afterward.

As for magical items, all is possible to he who thinks. The sky is the virtual limit! Most players ask for a description of the item first and go from there: "Sounds like a phylactery to me, Fred, let's see... there's one of Faithfulness, one of Long Years, and one for Monster Attraction." They then proceed to test the available choices and continue on to destroy more monsters and gain more treasure.

This time I threw a *Phylactery of Fumbling* at them, which they eventually decided was supposed to give the cleric a long life, and the next monster they ran into was a vampire. The faithful cleric dove into the fray with his trusty Mace *of* Disruption — and promptly dropped it! Before he could pick it up, the vampire hit him twice for a loss of 4 levels. Such fun!

The books themselves are not necessarily the final word on every question. There are statements in all of them to the effect that they are meant as guides only. To quote from the Afterword to the DMG:

"It is the spirit of the game, not the letter of the rules, which is important. Never hold to the letter written, nor allow some barracks room lawyer to force quotations from the rule book upon you, if it goes against the obvious intent of the game.... You are creator and final arbiter. By ordering things as they should be, the game as a whole first, your campaign next, and your participants thereafter, you will be playing ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS as it was meant to be. "

That statement says it all. To me, it is the most important statement in the entire DMG. If you are going to stick blindly to the books, use the charts in them exclusively, and never create something of your own, you may as well play a board game such as *Monopoly* or *Scrabble.* Their rules are written out, are not too complicated, and are basically inflexible. An AD&D™ game is not inflexible and was not meant to be. The books, even though they define a complicated structure of rules (which in many particular cases must be adhered to strictly), are in general very open-ended. Much of the text of the rules is taken up with general guidelines and lists of possibilities, leaving a multitude of options up to the DM.

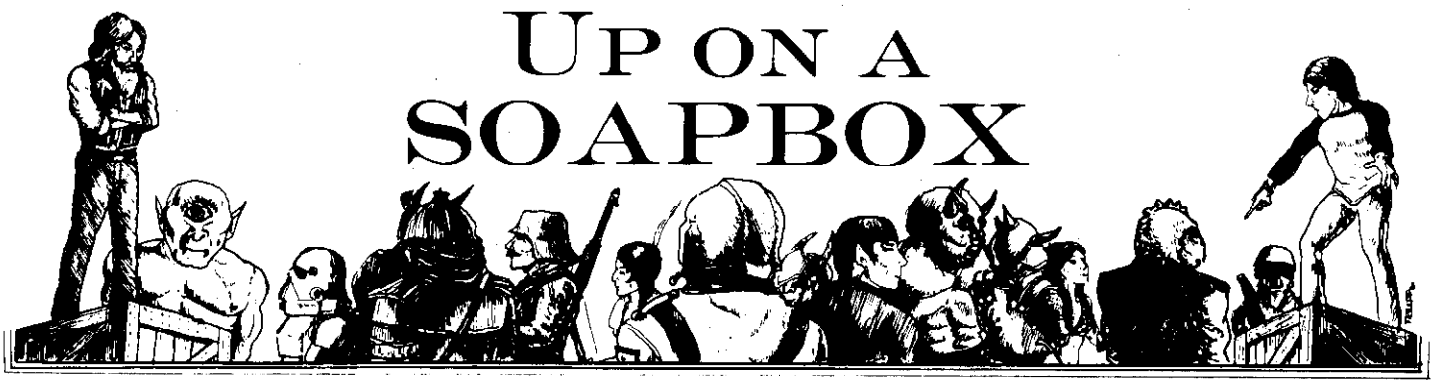
Players might be upset after exper-Fencing an unorthodox encounter. In the long run, however, they will come to realize that the game is more fun this way. They will not become so easily bored, and will tend to pay more attention to what is happening around them.

Your game must be challenging at all times. If it is not, players will become bored and may go looking elsewhere; your campaign will die a slow (or perhaps not so slow) death. It should be a personal Source of pride that your campaign is exciting, unique, and consistent yet always changing.

This does *not* mean that you should immediately drop everything and start changing your game so that it is unrecognizable as an AD&D campaign. Think carefully about anything you decide to change. Will it make the game unnecessarily complicated? Will it unbalance the game? These, and many others, are questions that you must take into consideration before altering anything.

On the other hand, if you feel that your game has gone too "far to be revived, there's nothing to stop you from scrapping it in favor of an entirely new campaign. I myself have had to junk two campaigns and start over. When you are a brand-new DM (particularly, although veterans do it, too) you often tend to turn the game into. a giveaway. Such was my problem, and the situation had to be rectified by scrapping the campaign.

The players should not read the DMG or the Monster Manual. But if they do, all is not lost for the DM who wants to keep some of the secrets of his world to himself. There are many things you can do to rectify the situation, and improve your game at the same time.



Adventuring with shaky hands

Where there's a will, there's a way to play

by Judith Sampson

If you've attended large gatherings of D&D® game enthusiasts, you've very likely met at least one handicapped or disabled player. Have you ever wondered how they conquered their limitations and became "just one of the players"?

I'm one such player. Here's what my problems are, and how I overcame them.

I have choreo-athetoid cerebral palsy, which sounds like the name of a creature from the AD&D™ Monster Manual. This means the motor control centers in my brain don't work properly. My body is gripped by writhing, dancing motions that interfere with my sense of balance, the use of my hands, and my reflexes. I can't drive a car, walking is a dangerous chore, and everyday life is a constant battle against a balky body. But I've achieved enough independence to maintain my own apartment, and I work part-time as an English composition coach at the University of Arizona, from which I have bachelor's and master's degrees in creative writing.

I wanted to play in a D&D adventure as soon as I heard about the game from players in the Society For Creative Anachronism, of which I am an active member. It took a long time to get a toehold in a game, though, primarily because I can't just hop in a car and drive to someone's home when that person says, "We're playing tonight, wanna come?"

One of my fellow SCA members, Kurt, rolled up my first D&D character at my request one afternoon during a long break between classes at the University of Arizona. I carried the statistics card on this character for over a year before any opportunity arose to actually play her.

Later I learned that the university had a Strategic Games Club which meets every Tuesday night. Although I attended several meetings, I never felt welcome there. Playing the D&D game turned out to be a passing fad for this club, and I searched again for several more months and years without finding a group of genuinely friendly players and DMs.

At last, I met Joubert, an ex-Navy frogman, a pre-law student, a genial man with whom I shared a keen interest in science fiction, fantasy literature, and playing the D&D game. Week after week, while we ate our lunches or waited for classes, he regaled me with tales of his exploits as a D&D player, past and present. I told him oneday, "If you ever set up your own campaign, I want a spot in it!"

About six weeks later, Joubert announced his dungeon was ready. Not only did he invite me, he arranged transportation to wherever his games were held. During those early games, I developed the methods of play and ways of bringing equipment I've used since.

I always tell a DM and other players my problem, and ask for the aid of their more nimble, willing fingers to write down the data and monetary information, hit points, or experience point changes on the score sheets. I also have other players move my character's miniature figure as needed, and if I must convey a secret message to the DM, I don't try to write it down; I go to him and whisper in his ear.

Like most other D&D players I've met, I feel better tossing dice in my bare hands —but when I do, the dice land anywhere but on the game table, which can invalidate a roll. I have found it best to handle one die at a time, tossed from a cup into a deep container used to catch the die as it falls.

Over the almost three years I have played in Joubert's campaign, I have accumulated a capacious canvas bag full of D&D and AD&D books, other game manuals, miniatures (some of these painted for me by player-friends) in a storage box, five different dice, a dice cup, a dice-catching box, and the record sheets for my characters.

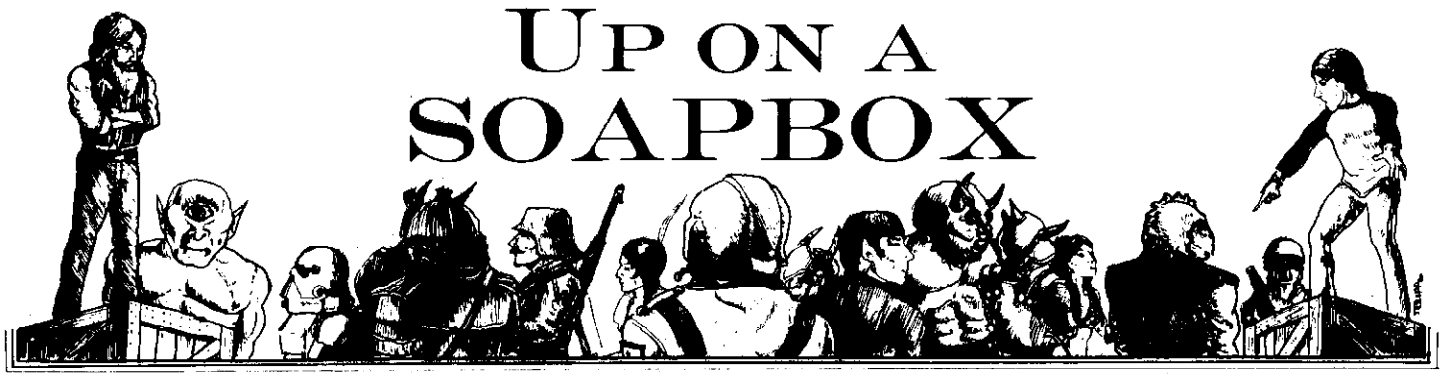
After my player characters' statistics are finalized and recorded, I type up the record sheets myself, photocopy them on legal-size paper, and store them in my canvas bag.

I have tried playing games by computer, but all the terminals I have played on have very sensitive keys, and when I strike them, I have no control over the heaviness or lightness of my touch. Hence, a computer usually beeps or screams at me instead of showing game data. To play successfully I must tell a comrade at the console which keys I wish to be punched.

Aside from playing in Joubert's campaign "by hand," I also play in a D&D game by mail. For me this is ideal; every 10 days or so the DM, Clif, informs me of what's happening to my character in his dungeon, and I respond what I hope is the proper action (usually I am able to write to him promptly). I need to roll no dice, I have no paraphernalia to carry; it's just me, my typewriter, and letter paper. The DM does all the rest!

But there is one problem, and it's a major one. Not everyone in the play-by-mail game has my compulsion to answer Clif as swiftly as possible, and sometimes Clif's other duties interfere with his promptness in sending new data. This makes for a long, drawn-out playing time for each adventure, and much attrition of players who lose interest or no longer have the time to commit.

The D&D and AD&D games are attractive to handicapped or disabled players for the same reasons that other people enjoy them. But to someone like me, hampered by hands and body that refuse to be reliable, running a fearless fighter, a nimble thief, a graceful elf, or a powerful paladin offers the opportunity to be resourceful and quick on one's feet for a while, which never happens in my all-too-mundane real world. Free, agile, and daring in spirit I play, but I can never forget that when the game's done, I face a much greater adversary than any a DM can dream up: my balky body.



Play a villain? An evil idea

by Brian Blume

It is very difficult to believe that any intelligent AD&D™ player would deliberately choose to play a character of evil alignment.

Of course, AD&D games, being made of the stuff of heroic fantasy, necessarily deal with the concepts of good and evil — how else could characters perform brave and heroic deeds if no evil beings existed to vanquish? Thus, the game must allow for evil characters to exist. But, as in real life, no thinking player should want a life of evil with all its inherent disadvantages.

In real life, evil people tend to be ostricized from society. No one trusts them; no one co-operates with them. Play in the AD&D game, if the DM and the players portray their roles correctly, reflects these disadvantages in even a more pronounced manner than in real life.

The Dungeon Masters Guide defines the evil sentiment this way: "This ethos holds that seeking to promote weal (welfare) for all actually brings woe to the truly deserving. Natural forces which are meant to cull out the weak and stupid are artificially supressed by so-called Good and the fittest are wrongfully held back, so whatever means are expedient can be used by the powerful to gain and maintain their dominance, without concern for anything." Thus a player choosing to play an evil character, in order to play the role of the character properly, must follow this creedo faithfully: Might makes right. The strong take whatever they want from the weak. *Justice* has no meaning. Only the strong have the right to survive and rule. Concepts like loyalty, honor and truth are meaningless.

It is easy to see what events will follow in a well-played game where one player of a group chooses to adopt the role of an evil character. No one can trust that character — and many will find it nearly impossible to co-operate with a character they cannot trust. The player portraying the evil character, if playing the role properly, eventually will not be invited to the games with other players and will have to go on adventures alone. (This is a horrible fate!) As in real life, teamwork and co-operation are vital to achieving the greatest amount of success in a well run game; this is the essence of the AD&D game. A person who must adventure by themselves is at an incredible disadvantage.

In games where several players choose to adopt evil roles, the results are even more profound if the roles are played properly and the game is well run. No one can trust anyone else. The characters will continually strive at cross-purposes to become the most powerful at the expense of the others. Co-operation will be nonexistent. When one succeeds at becoming the most powerful and starts dominating the others, the group will either disintegrate into separate solitary adventurers or the weaker players will continually look for an opportunity to crush the leader at a moment of weakness. Under these circumstances, it is impossible for one or more evil characters to complete and be as successful as a group of good characters whose byword in cooperation.

Thus, evil in the game has the same effects as evil in real life. There is no trust and no co-operation, only fear and hatred.

One final insult to evil is built into the game. Certain valuable magic items, especially magic swords, are usable only by characters of certain alignments, and the number of such items are available to evil characters is severly limited. Using the example of magic words, only 15% of all magic swords are usable by evil characters, as opposed to the 35% that are usable by neutral characters and the 55% that are usable by good characters. This is definately a discouragement to evil characters.

In real life, evil people end up friendless and unwanted. They exist only by creating fear in those they can dominate. In a well-played role, an AD&D character will end up in exactly the same position. To repeat the opening statement . . . It is very difficult to believe that any intelli- AD&D player would deliberately choose to play a character of evil alignment in the course of their game.

Dungeons aren't supposed to be 'for men only'

by Roger E. Moore

Of the many people I've known in four years of playing the D&D® and AD&D™ games, one guy I won't forget created a particularly savage universe for some adventures. Many of the players in his campaign were struck by the extreme levels of violence during the sessions; the atrocities committed were much encouraged by the Dungeon Master himself. One afternoon he was showing me the long lists of non-player characters from each city on his mapboards. "If you'll look at all the women characters," he said, "you'll see that I made their charmismas really high and their strengths really low. That's so they're easier to rape when their city gets conquered."

None of his players were female; although some of the guys in the campaign wanted them, no willing women were ever found — not surprising, since women weren't given any encouragement to join, and would have had difficulty relating to a universe based on rape, butchery and unbeatable monsters. Eventually, even the male players tired of the campaign, and it folded.

The best role-playing games, to quote Jean Wells and Kim Mohan in their article *Women Want Equality"* (DRAGON #39), allow for "the possibility of intrigue, mystery, and romance involving both sexes, to the benefit of all characters in a campaign." All-male D&D and AD&D groups, for whatever fun they are, lack this and the loss can be felt by all. Some players go to considerable lengths to bring wives, girlfriends, and other female acquaintances to game sessions, help them roll up characters, and get them involved in the group. Sometimes a male Dungeon Master can make the chances of equalizing a group a lot more difficult by not examining his own feelings about women players in the game.

Male Dungeon Masters must be aware of several factors when running a game with both sexes acting as players. One of these things involves rape, which wise DM's will avoid having occur regardless of their players' gender. Male players with female characters don't seem to care much about this if it happens to their characters; some even seem to get a kick out of it somehow. If a female character gets raped in the game, particularly by one of the DM's NPC's, the player in all likelihood will be very embarassed, very upset, and very angry and hostile. It's probable that the player may quit playing D&D games altogether, or at least find someone else's group. Sure, a DM can argue that rape is something that happens in both real and fantasy worlds (is your fantasy world also beset by inflation, high unemployment, and racism to make it more real?), or that the female player brought it on herself by acting seductively (blaming the victim is always fun), or that the female player is getting upset over nothing. I'd be interested in hearing what male gamers would think if their favorite male characters became part of a scenario reminiscent of the novel/movie *Deliverance.* Sound exciting? I didn't think so. Keep it in mind.

Female players also resent being regulated to a second-class position in the game. Many male DM's are fond of game universes set along the lines of John Norman's Gor/Counter-Earth series, where women exist as slaves to serve men. The Arduin Grimoire Trilogy went so far as to establish a whole character class (for female characters) called the Courtesan, basically a non-adventuring prostitute. This will tickle the women in your group as much as it would tickle them in real life, meaning they'll probably hate it with a passion. Women are as capable of feats of heroism, genius, and cunning as men are in D&D games. My wife's halfling thief character (female) once earned a place in local D&D legend by pulling off all the missiles from a necklace of fireballs and throwing them all at once into a cave full of Frost Giants, killing about fifty of them and saving the group from being shot with ballistas. The same character was smart enough and lucky enough to survive the entire trip into Gary Gygax's *The Tomb of Horrors* module, which is a remarkable feat in itself. She was the only character not killed or seriously injured, always using her head to avoid the gravest dangers. The character of another female player was in a party with me walking in the hills one nice fantasy summer day when a Beholder caught us at close range. In a couple of rounds most of us had been death-rayed, stoned, or telekinesed away. All the survivors ran for the woods except for her character, who was *charmed* and made her nearly immune to further magical attacks. She could've run; I certainly did. Instead she turned around and made the Beholder into Hamburger Helper. Her reward was instant hero status in our group for as long as she gamed with us. Everyone in D&D games wants to be great in some way, men and women alike. To deny this to a player on the basis of sex is to do all your players a disservice.

Some female players enjoy having their characters flirt a lot with the other male players' characters, just as the guys like their characters to flirt with female characters. Some want their characters to do more than just flirt. What happens if one's character gets pregnant (which in game terms is a definite hold-back to one's career)? The DM can help circumvent this problem in one of several ways:

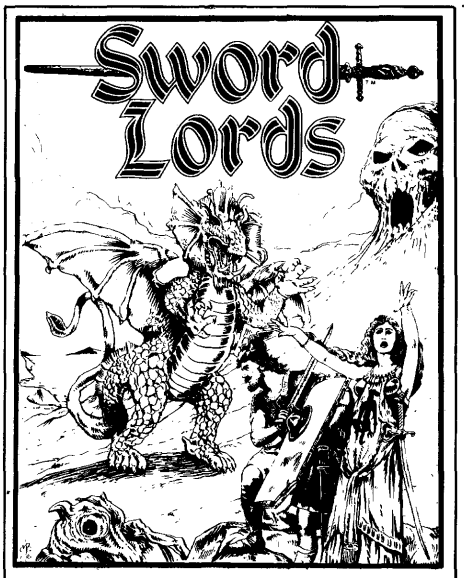
— Don't bother to "role for pregnancy", assuming divine intervention is responsible (Isis and Athena don't want their female followers laid up having babies all the time, interrupting their careers, etc.)

— Suggest in a roundabout way that a *Wish* could be used to prevent the possibility of unintentional future. pregnancies. If Wishes can do anything they can certainly do this.

— Have a Magic-User invent a magic pill that permanently prevents conception unless the female characters want to get pregnant.

The most important thing a DM can do for male and female players alike is to be fair and not make a habit out of singling out one sex for more protection or more damaging encounters than the other sex. If you have a gang of louts on some streetcorner insult all the women characters in one encounter, have another group insult all the men in another. Maybe better, have them insult everybody. Fairness on the part of the DM will be much appreciated by the group, because it reduces friction between the group members and the DM, and contributes to the success of the campaign.

In short, giving an Amazon the same chances for doing great deeds as a Hercules has can really make the game for your players and for you.



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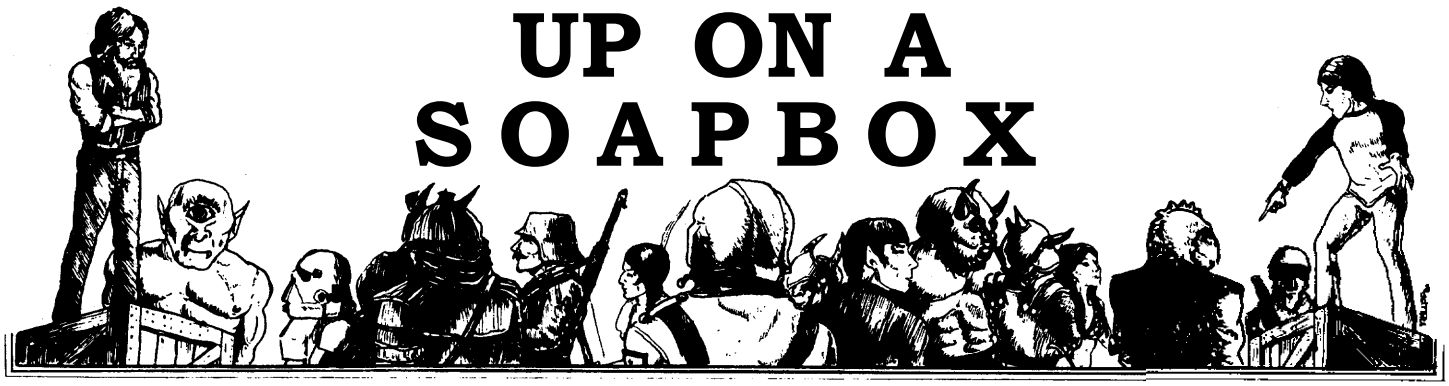

UP ON A SOAPBOX

In gaming, your style will tell

by Lewis Pulsipher

When gamers discuss their preferences they usually concentrate on the purpose behind a game design, the realism (simulation) vs. playability question. Should the game be designed primarily to reflect/reproduce history — even a made-up history such as a science fiction novel? Or should history be subordinated to the need for an interesting, easy-to-play game?

In other words, players talk about *game* styles, not *playing* styles. This could be because many gamers are indifferent players, content to play a game a few times and then put it aside rather than attempt to learn the best moves and strategies. With hundreds of games on the market, this attitude isn't surprising. But two basic game-playing styles do exist, no matter the game being played.

Harkening back to the well-known nineteenth century distinction in music, painting, and other arts, I call the two styles the Classical and the Romantic. The perfect Classical player tries to know each game inside out. He wants to learn the best countermove to every move his opponent might make. He takes nothing for granted, paying attention to little details which probably won't matter most of the time, but which in certain cases could be important. He dislikes risks — not that he never takes risks, but he prefers a slow-but-steady, certain win to a quick but only probable attempt at victory. He tries not to be overcautious, however, for fear of becoming predictable. He tries to maximize his minimum gain each turn — as the "perfect player" of mathematical game theory is expected to do — rather than make moves and attacks which could gain a lot but might leave him worse off than when he started.

A cliche among football fans is that the best teams win by making fewer mistakes, letting the other team beat itself. So it is with the Classical wargamer, who concentrates on eliminating errors rather than on discovering brilliant coups. When a less than top-class player tries to play classically he can be predictable, unimaginative, overcautious; he won't get clobbered, but he may find himself consistently falling short of victory. A poor player who wants to play classically tends to let his pieces mill around, accomplishing very little. He just doesn't know how to get started, so he plays ultra-cautiously and goes nowhere.

The perfect Romantic looks for the decisive blow that will cripple his enemy, psychologically if not physically (on the board). He wishes to convince his opponent of the inevitability of defeat; in some cases, a player with a still-tenable position will resign a game to a Romantic opponent when he has been beaten psychologically.

The Romantic is willing to take a risk in order to disrupt enemy plans and throw the game into a line of play his opponent is unfamiliar with. He looks for opportunities for a big gain, rather than "only" trying to maximize his minimum gain. A flamboyant (but at best only probable) win is his goal. He may make mistakes, but he hopes to seize victory rather than wait for the enemy to beat himself. The Romantic player tends to be a little sloppy about seemingly minor details; if he gets in his decisive blow(s), he won't need to worry about little things — and if his big coups fail, those little things won't make a difference in the overall result. When a less than top-class player tries the Romantic style he tends to attack a lot, taking risks without good reason. Usually the risks will catch up with him. A poor Romantic player specializes in banzai charges, forced marches, single-handed attacks, and dissipation of effort and strength to no good purpose.

Some examples and further explication are desirable. Chess is a game which leans to the Classical approach, epitomized by the style of American Bobby Fischer and all Russian players in general. But Romantics play the game, too. Some years ago Fischer met Bent Larsen in a match to determine who would go on to the next round of the World Championship elimination. Larsen attempted to throw Fischer off stride by making unusual moves. He hoped that Fischer wouldn't be able to correctly analyze all the unusual positions. But Fischer's knowledge of the game is unmatched, and by countering Larsen's ploys, Fischer won the match 6-0.

Larsen's moves were probably not the best possible, but if Fischer had not previously determined what would be the best line of play to follow in each case, he might have lost.

The Russians have been known as masters of the draw. Two Classical players contesting a heavily analyzed game like chess can often finish in a draw, though Fischer shows that the very finest Classical player can find new and superior lines of play to slowly overwhelm an opponent. (Fischer is also known as a master of the psyche-out; no doubt he has a Romantic streak in him.)

Let's get closer to standard wargames and adventure games. *Starforce Alpha Centauri* is designed to favor the Romantic player. The designer has said that the game is like two karate masters maneuvering, looking for an opening for a single, decisive blow to end the contest. The option to move in overdrive, farther than permitted normally but with a chance for a potentially disastrous failure, is custom-made for the Romantic player.

On the other hand, *Stellar Conquest* is a game of many options and much detail. The articles about *Stellar Conquest* which have appeared in DRAGON™ Magazine and other publications indicate how much mastery of the game is required to play it well.

In *Afrika Korps* the Romantic, playing the German side, might risk a 2-1 or 1-2 attack on Tobruk, while the Classical player would besiege the place and go on toward Alexandria, expecting that if he played well he would either force the British to abandon Tobruk or he would take their home base.

Diplomacy, though without any overt chance factor, is a good game for both Classical and Romantic players. The ne-

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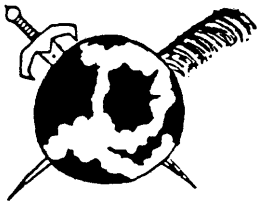

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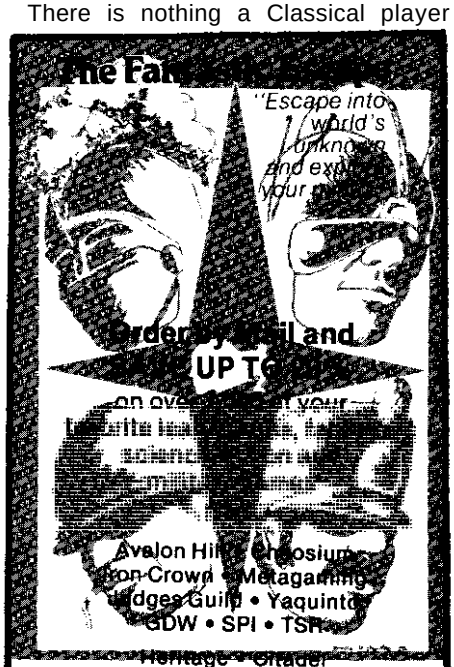
gotiations and alliance structures give both types plenty to work with. The Classical player tends to be better at tactics and strategy; he prefers long alliances to continuous free-for-all, for there are too many risks and incalculable factors inherent in such a fluid situation. The Romantic tends to prefer the fluid state, and his big weapon is the backstab.

The D&D® and AD&D™ games, to name two prominent examples of role-playing games, are unusual insofar as there is no player-enemy, but both playing styles can be discerned. The Classical player tries to avoid a reliance on dice, though he must accept the occasional melee (where luck tends to average out). He hates to roll a saving throw. He likes to devise thorough, sometimes complicated plans to defeat a monster or trap with a minimum of risk. The Romantic doesn't mind risking a saving throw against spells (or whatever) in order to get in his blow at the enemy. Sometimes he likes to rely on guile and bluff. The second-level character who pretends to be a 20th-level magic-user and slaps a dragon in the face must be accounted a Romantic!

There is nothing a Classical player hates more than losing to an inferior player because of bad dice throws. For this reason, he avoids the more Romantic games, such as *Starforce,* because in such games even a poor player will occasionally luck out and win. (This is one reason why there are more Romantic than Classical games — more people will play the former because the less skillful players still have a chance to win, as they do not in a Classical game.) While the good Romantic player is inclined to occasionally take a calculated risk, the poor Romantic is prone to gamble quite often (usually because he can't think of anything better to do), and once in a while he'll hit the jackpot.

Don't confuse the intuitive player with the Romantic. Many good players depend on intuition rather than study and logic to make good moves, yet the moves can be either Classical or Romantic. A Romantic player can also be a very cerebral or intellectual player who happens to prefer the Romantic style. Some people would refer to Classical players with derision as "mathematical" players. It is true that Classical players are concerned with odds and expected losses (though this alone doesn't identify or qualify a person as a Classical player). Nonetheless, Classical players do quite well in non-mathematical games.

If you can identify your opponent's playing style, you may be able to take advantage of it. A Romantic may be suckered into an area which looks weak but is not. A Classical player may be unable to react effectively to unusual moves. Obviously, this discussion of playing styles is simplified; no one is wholly Romantic or wholly Classical, and some people are Romantic when they play some games and Classical in other games. Whatever style your opponent uses, recognizing it is the first step to taking advantage of his weaknesses.



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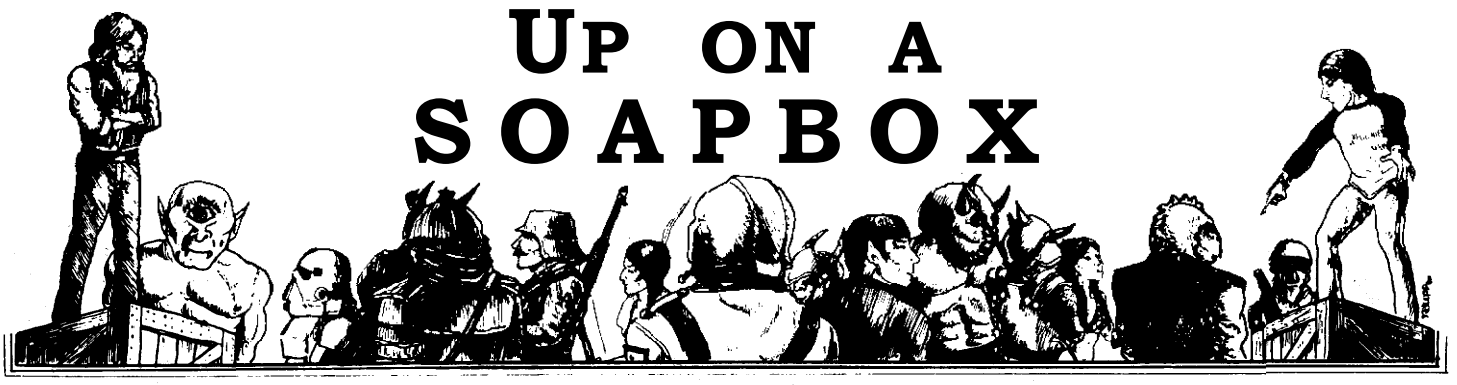

Individuals do make a difference

by Paul Montgomery Crabaugh

It is popular to denigrate the role of the individual in history and in current events. Over and over, in news and opinions and lectures, one can hear the refrain that history is an inexorable tide, sweeping over individual attainments.

The name of the game is socio-economic forces. Political and social leaders merely ride the tide of events; wars merely confirm changes that have already occurred; great inventors were simply present at "steam engine time"—the idea being that if technology has reached the state where a steam engine is possible, then someone will invent a steam engine. If that person falls under a rock, someone else will do it.

There's a considerable amount of truth to this notion. Take the American Revolution. The key change in the colonies during that period was not that a bunch of smugglers and amateur terrorists decided to stir up a revolution. The important change had occurred years earlier, very subtly, as Englishmen living in America began to think of themselves as Americans living in America. It was this change in the way people thought that made it impossible for England to hold the colonies, because it changed the Crown from a heavy-handed but legal government to a bitterly resented occupying army. The Revolution merely confirmed, for the world to see, that the change had occurred.

Similarly, steam engines really were inevitable at the time they were invented. They were so easy to imagine and construct that any one of dozens or hundreds of people could have invented the steam engine with no help from the others.

It's the sizable kernel of truth in this line of thinking that leads to much criticism of heroic literature, in both fantasy and science fiction genres, and a lot of that criticism spills over into heroic games.

After all, if one buys the view that individual people don't count for much, how much credence can one lend to fiction — or games, which stress individual attainment over all else?

I don't propose to touch the other side of the coin, which is to question how such a person can support a society which places the rights of the individual above all. I'm not writing a book, yet. Let's confine the discussion to the validity of the notion that individuals have only a slight influence on the flow of history.

Let's have a look at three figures in fairly recent history, individuals and individualists all, associated with major events, and see to what extent their accomplishments could have been relegated to someone else. For a good spread, we'll use one political leader, one scientist and one military leader.

There was no law of nature that required that Abraham Lincoln win the election of 1860. He could have still been a depressed lawyer. A relatively uncompromising idealist, he could easily have found it impossible to get serious attention. One could easily see another figure taking his place at the front of the major political and social upheaval that was inexorably taking place, with or without Lincoln. Regardless of who was (or was about to be) in the White House, slavery was about to take the final plunge, the problem of states' rights was about to get polished off, and the political power of the South was about to die.

On the other hand, a different, less

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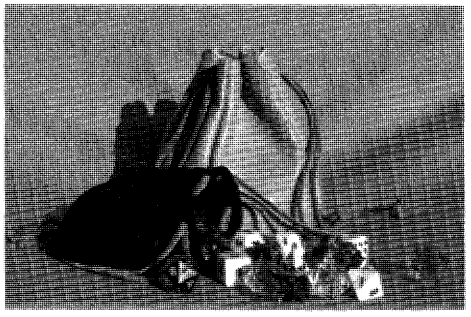

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controversial leader might not have touched off the flare of fury that Abraham Lincoln's election ignited in the South. Secession might have been delayed, or aborted altogether in favor of a protracted battle in Congress. Even if secession were to occur, things might have been greatly changed. A leader lacking Lincoln's self-confidence and his flair for psychological warfare might well have rushed into the Civil War, dragging a divided and weakened North with him. It took lots of nerve to sit and wait, knowing that the South would have to strike, have to reduce Fort Sumter, and thus provide the same unifying event that Pearl Harbor did a century later. Under different circumstances, the war might have dragged on for more years, might have come to a negotiated settlement, or might have been even more bitter and destructive than the one we knew. We might still be feeling the reverberations of such a war.

What about Albert Einstein? A classic steam-engine case. The problems he solved had been kicking around physics for years; they would have been solved by someone, sooner or later. All Einstein did was make it sooner rather than later.

But timing can be important. If Einstein had remained a patent clerk in Switzerland, how long might those problems have remained unsolved? They weren't easy; it took genius to see the solutions, and genius is difficult to predict or produce. The Michaelson-Morley experiment had been bothering people for two decades; it might well have been two decades more before someone else came up with Special Relativity to put a final solution on it.

That extra delay could have slowed down nuclear and subnuclear research by years. The atom was first split in 1939 — the year the Second World War broke out. Suppose the atom-splitting hadn't happened in 1939 and wasn't destined to happen until 1949. Nobody would have wasted any great amount of war effort on anything so science-fictiony as an atomic bomb, and they wouldn't have gotten a bomb in time to affect the outcome of the war anyway. The most obvious result would have been the invasion of Japan: Operation Olympic and Operation Coronet. After a protracted and bloody campaign to finally put down Japan, how far could MacArthur have gone in picking Japan up after the war, getting it going, installing a workable government? How far would either country have allowed him to go? It seems doubtful that Japan would ever have become the powerful, peaceful ally of the United States that it is now. The consequences of such a sequence of history would be great indeed; Japan's importance in the politics of the Pacific Ocean can scarcely be overstated.

The last, and certainly most ephemeral, figure we'll consider is a military leader, a general in the Second World War — George S. Patton. Here, surely, is the sort of person whose influence on the course of history is slight. A general, not especially high in the chain of command, a classic individualist, lacking any political influence or ambition, whose moment of glory was a fight whose eventual outcome was virtually foreordained — once the United States entered the war, we can see, in retrospect, that there was no reasonable doubt about the outcome of the war. The Axis was out of its league.

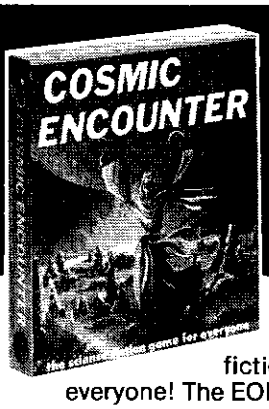
Certainly Patton could have been erased from history easily enough. He was an old man when the war broke out. He was a walking stress condition. He took inordinate risks. Any number of things might have slain him or sent him back to the States, perhaps in 1942 or 1943.

So he might not have been available for Operation Cobra, the breakout from the Normandy bridgehead. Could another general have filled his shoes? Not really. Other generals would have risen to fame, would have made their mark, but nothing on earth could have made, say, the quiet, careful, enormously competent but conventional Hodges into the go-for-broke human tornado that was Patton.

Hodges, for example, would almost certainly have carried out his orders in Cobra and subdued the Brittany peninsula. He would never have dreamed of going berserk, smashing his way like some kind of military Andromeda Strain across the length of France, regardless of the best efforts of the high commands of both sides to stop him.

Would the Allies have lost the war under different circumstances than Patton provided? Of course not. But they would have been delayed — perhaps a month, perhaps two. And with one or two months of additional campaigning on the Eastern Front, the Russians would have marched much further into Germany than they did in real life. And, after the war, they showed little inclination to give up occupied territory. Can you imagine the consequences of having the border between the Warsaw Pact and NATO lie along the Rhine River? France would not have been able to afford the luxury of toying with NATO — it would have been that nation's neck on the chopping block, not West Germany's. The whole character of post-war politics for four decades would have been altered. That's quite a bit of influence for a single man.

So the next time someone criticizes the realism of the dominant characters in the heroic fantasy literature so near and dear to our hearts, or the heroic fantasy games that are perhaps even nearer and dearer, ask them to have a look at history. Much of what we are today has been shaped by individuals who didn't believe in their own ineffectiveness.



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Up on a Soapbox

Level titles don't do justice

They aren't used much, and aren't useful anyway

By John T. Sapienza, Jr.

The custom of giving each level within every character class its own distinctive name, at least for the first eight or so levels, dates back to the original D&D® rules of 1973. At that time, there were exactly three official roles played in the game, and of these provision was made for clerics of up to eighth level (L 8), fighters of up to L 9, and magic-users of up to L 11. (The experience point tables went no higher.) It appears that the original concept was that characters would use the level names in gaming as designations of rank or skill, instead of using the overall character class name. This makes a kind of superficial sort of sense, since it is a matter of pride to have achieved high rank in any field. And since a character will be spending any number of expeditions in practice at a given level, giving that level a name to go by must have looked useful.

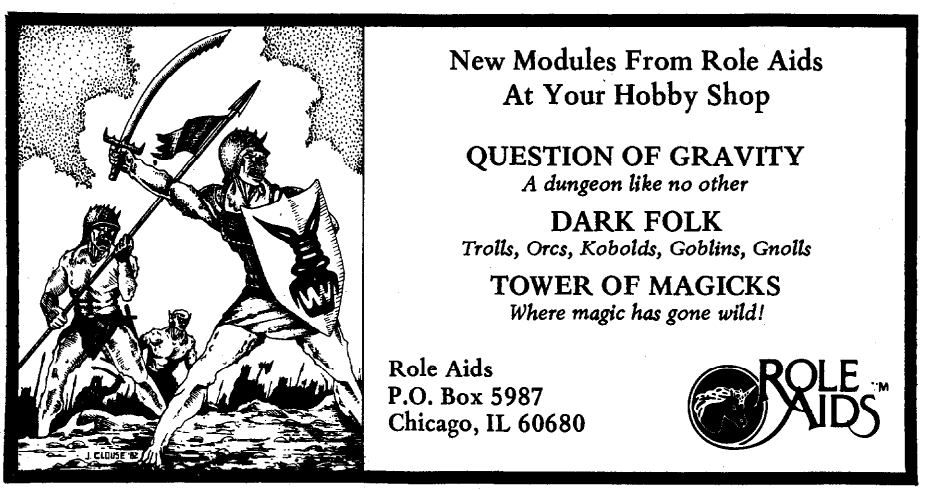
The problem is that, as a practical matter, the level names are *not* useful. How many D&D or AD&D™ players memorize the level names of all the character classes? How many actually refer to their characters by their official level names? If you were trying to fill out a well-balanced party, would you tell the players that they have a Swashbuckler, a Hero, a Theurgist, and a Village Priest to choose from? Based on my own experience in playing regularly over the years with four groups, plus watching what happens at conventions, I am inclined to doubt it. The actual practice I have seen is to tell the players you have two fighters, one L 4 and one L 5, plus a L 4 magic-user and a L 3 cleric to fill in needed places in the party.

Well, you might say, whether or not the level names are widely used in gaming, they look neat in the rulebooks. And besides, why not offer them to the minority of gamers who may actually want to use them? Because there are not enough descriptive words to go around to supply distinctive names for every level of every character class.

It is obvious that the authors of the level tables delved deeply into their thesauruses in producing names for levels. For example, the cleric table in the original D&D rules lists the levels titles as Acolyte, Adept, Village Priest, Vicar, Curate, Bishop, Lama, and Patriarch, On a purely technical level, several of these make no sense: Vicar and Curate are lay titles, and the title "Adept" is traditionally reserved for magic-users of the highest level of skill. On the character level, many of the clerical titles used are far too specific to actual religions to be usable as general-purpose game terms. You would no more speak of a "Bishop" of a Tibetan monastery than you would speak of a "Lama" of a Catholic diocese, yet the rules have them as the official titles for all L 7 and L 8 clerics.

Other level titles leave one wondering whether the authors gave much consideration to the real-life meanings of the words chosen. The list of level names for magic-users is a particularly good example of this problem, since most of the names have specific reference to distinct types of specialization in magic, and yet all are used as if they meant nothing but "magic-user." A Medium contacts the spirits of the dead; a Seer foretells the future; a Conjurer summons things or creatures, and so forth. A Necromancer specializes in the undead, and might be a more appropriate title for an evil high priest than for a L 8 magic-user.

Both the fighter and cleric tables show another fallacy in the use of names for levels. At level 9, a fighter has enough status to be appointed Baron, or its campaign equivalent, and build a castle. So at L 9, a fighter is titled "Lord" or "Lady." At L 7, a cleric is titled "Bishop." The problem with this approach is that a given character may or may not have achieved sufficient social status for the Powers That Be to hand out the official responsibilities that underlie those titles. The fallacy lies in using job titles for level names, since a level is a reflection of



accumulated skill but has nothing whatsoever to do with the character's being actually promoted to hold official titles of nobility or ecclesiastical rank.

The use of level names for character classes has little practical use in gaming, and tends to create more problems than it is worth. I suggest that DRAGON™ Magazine stop including level names from now on in character class articles. *(Editor's note: The suggestion is noted. However, in the interest of consistency and uniformity, we'll continue to publish level* titles *in experience-level charts for variant NPC classes. We try to present new classes in a form that's as compatible as possible with the official rules. Readers who do use level titles to refer to their characters will also be* able to do so *for variant NPCs they might want to try out, and those who don't use level titles haven't been 'hurt" by our inclusion of them in the articles. As a practical mat*ter, *level titles are hardly ever mentioned in any other type of article, but we'll continue to do so when such a usage is appropriate to the nature and tone of the article.)*

Eliminating the level titles has the further advantage that by standardizing terms, we make possible a simple abbreviation system. By ignoring the various arbitrary level names and standardizing on the character-class names as the game term, you can then abbreviate the character-class names and add the appropriate level number in describing characters. Fighter would be abbreviated "F," cleric would be "C," thief "T," magic-user "MU," druid "D," bard "B," monk "MK," illusionist "I," paladin "P," and ranger "R," for example. You could then easily note the composition of a group of NPCs for convenience, thus: F2, F2, F2, F3, F4, C4, MU3, T4. This also adds consistency and detail to the customary abbreviations to describe a player character, since "F3 L/N 14/11/9/10/11/6" would be readily understood to mean "A fighter of third level, alignment lawful neutral, having Strength 14, Intelligence 11, Wisdom 9, Constitution 10, Dexterity 11, and Charisma 6." ♈

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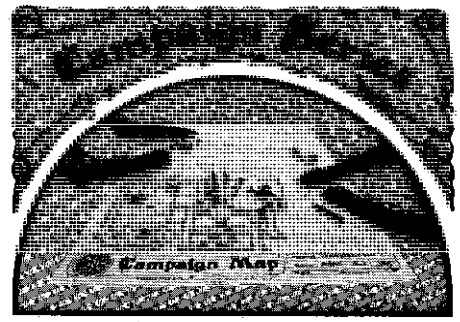

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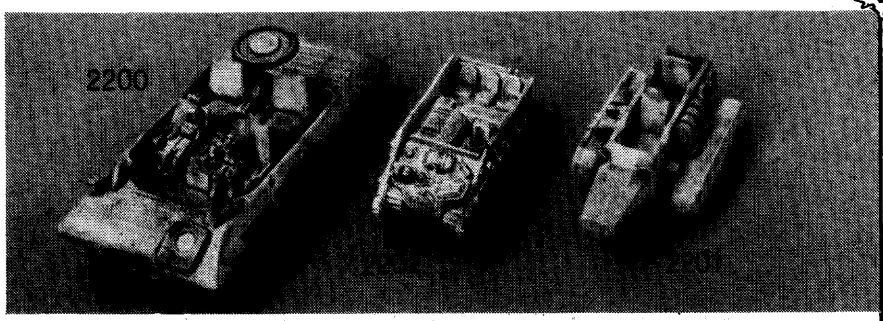

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Up on a Soapbox

All for all, not one for one

Selfish motives have no place in gaming

by Roger E. Moore

There is a peculiar practice (peculiar to me, anyway) going on in the role-playing world in which contests are held to give out an award to the best individual player, instead of to the best-performing team of players. Granted, it's nice to congratulate someone who has done a superb job of role-playing, problem solving, leading the group, or even just keeping the atmosphere light and enjoyable. On the other hand, this practice tends to misplace the more important emphasis of a role-playing game, and can lead to more problems than one might expect.

It could be argued that nothing is wrong with recognizing players for their personal ability; one could draw a parallel with the Olympics, if one wanted to stretch it that far, and point out that most awards there are for individual effort. Unfortunately, role-playing games are not structured by and large for individual competition. While any one player may have a character who is quite powerful, nearly all role-playing games are designed so that it's difficult for just one character to successfully resolve any one scenario. It takes the combined skills and efforts of all the group members to meet and defeat the obstacles that the game referee cares to put in the way of achieving the adventure's goal. Most role-playing games have character-generation systems which split up the various skills and abilities into "character classes" or "prior service tables" (like the AD&D™ and *Traveller* games, respectively) to promote interdependence among group members; no one character can have all the powers needed to accomplish a mission. If this were so, it would tend to make group adventures unnecessary; why split treasure with someone when you can get to it by yourself? Instead, in the AD&D™ game system there are fighters, magic-users, rangers, paladins, thieves, and so forth, each with their own skills and talents. In *Traveller* there are Marines, Doctors, Scouts, Pirates, Merchants, and other services. Even game systems like *Runequest* and *Call of Cthulhu*, which allow any one character to develop any number of skills, are set up so that it is impossible to be an expert at *everything;* someone may be good at thieving, another good at fighting, and someone else good at spell-casting, but no one can do everything. (If so, then someone is either cheating or has played continually over several years, working their skills up.) Combat in particular calls for coordinated effort; one person, even a Conan-type, cannot stand long against a horde of orcs, baboons, Zhodani, or Fungi from Yuggoth without some help from friends.

Of all the games in which I've participated, as a player or as a referee, group cooperation has been the one element that most affected whether or not a group was going to succeed on a mission. People tend to have an exaggerated idea of how important their individual characters are in a game, and often lose sight of this point. Some will do all they can to become the "shining star" in the group, making themselves obnoxious with their insistence on not cooperating.

If this sort of individuality is too strongly encouraged over group effort, there is an excellent chance the adventure will disintegrate into petty bickering and heavy-handed struggles for the position of King of the Heap. in the extreme, this will produce assassinations and fighting among group characters even in the middle of a critical adventure. One scenario I

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refereed, an expedition into a fire giant's lair, was aborted at the outset when one group member had his character kill off another character; this act could be defended by the player's claim that he played his character within his alignment, since he had an evil thief and the victim was a paladin. But now the group was in no shape to carry on the adventure, the guy playing the paladin quit, and the adventure was over for the day before it had begun. Another group, more tightly coordinated and more determined, played the same adventure on a later day and had the honor of smashing the lair.

Players generally want to cooperate with each other, and people who don't play by the rules (the unwritten ones about cooperating) can find themselves facing down the most dangerous of all opponents in any game: an enraged group of player characters. It is truly amazing just how effectively and completely one character, regardless of power or level can be greased by everyone else (unless the DM decides to pull strings and prevent this somehow). One of the most personally satisfying incidents of this sort I've heard of involved some players (friends of mine) who were having trouble dealing with one player's character who always seemed to try to dominate the gaming sessions, break group rulings, and so forth. Matters came to a head one evening, and an epic battle ensued in which many-dice fireballs flew and technological weapons, long hidden on group members from previous expeditions, were pulled out and used. The battle ended in the disintegration of the offending character and a spontaneous ten-minute celebration by the surviving members. It is one thing to be an outlaw from society; it is another, and more fatal, thing to be an outlaw from a group.

The other extreme is possible, too. I had a character introduced into one group and then discovered that the other players were in the habit of killing new characters, so *their* characters could take the newcomers' gold and magical items. My character got lucky and escaped, with the help of the character of a friend of mine (who was also almost slain by the other characters). But we never gamed with that group again. Months later, one of the cutthroat players saw me and asked why I never came back. Some people have a difficult time seeing the obvious.

How many times can you recall having your character play second fiddle to another character in a role-playing game? How many people can you recall who played as if this game was some kind of "survival of the fittest" competition, in which they intended to be Numero Uno? What about adventures in which no one wanted to do the same thing, and cooperation was hard to get without a lot of hurt feelings and comments like, "Okay, my wizard will go with you to the Caverns of Doom, but he isn't gonna help anybody out of trouble. . . ."? Do you remember those times as being particularly entertaining?

Try the other viewpoint. Think of those adventures in which everyone seemed to be having a good time, not just one person by himself. Was everyone involved in the adventure in some way? Did people have a chance to use their skills, to share in the combat, and get a share of the loot at the end? Did people work together, or was it dog-eat-dog? Sure, we all recall someone who showed an aptitude for figuring out traps, directing the group, giving needed advice, or telling jokes that had everyone rolling on the floor. But didn't other characters have their moments in the sun, too?

The true mark of a good role-player, in any game system, is the ability to work well with others. It is all well and good to have a +5 Holy Sword, and 18's in all of one's characteristics, but if one cannot get along with other players and interact effectively with them, one might have trouble finding groups who will accept him to game on a regular basis. At worst, one might find that his character is being eyed as another potential enemy to be eliminated. Groups are made up of individuals, but individuals must learn to act as a group if they plan to get anywhere on a role-playing adventure. 8

Combots: Gladiatorial robots battle to the end in this game of the future. Each player builds his own robot out of an assortment of offensive componets. Each combination has its advantages and disadvantages, it's up to the player to choose the best. Play lasts only 15 to 30 minutes in this quick and easy game. Included with the game is a mounted 11 x 17 inch game board, rule book and two 1½ inch high metal combots. These detailed figures serve as both playing pieces and a record

keeping system. Each 4 piece combot contains slots for 12 pieces of equipment. The players simply pick from the weapons assortment and place their choice on the combot. When the weapon becomes damaged in combat it is simply removed ... $15.00

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